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HEIDI THE LITTLE SINGER

By the Author of "Heidi"



Johanna Spyri

SPYRI, JOHANNA, 1827-1901.

EVELI : THE LITTLE SINGER /

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EVELI
THE LITTLE SINGER

EVELI THE LITTLE SINGER

By JOHANNA SPYRI

AUTHOR of

"Heidi," "Mäzli," "Dora," "Cornelli,"
"Children of the Alps," etc.

TRANSLATED by

ELISABETH P. STORK



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PEPPINO

PEPPINO

CHAPTER I

TWO STRANGERS IN ALBANO

BRIGHT, cheerful sunshine was streaming down to the long, paved street of Albano. At one end of it stand the old portals of the town, at the other, a large building, the "Hotel Roma." The hotel looks out over the sun-bathed Campagna with its many tumble-down gravestones and old ruins. Whoever stands on one of the little balconies of the hotel can gaze far across the bright heather dotted with dark oaks.

An open victoria was seen coming down the sunny street. Two ladies, its occupants, showed great interest in everything they saw, eagerly turning their heads to and fro. Sometimes it even happened that by rapidly gazing towards opposite sides they knocked their heads against each other. Now, however, their

attention was directed to one and the same point. At the entrance of a side street, which led up a steep incline toward the left, stood a dense crowd of people. One could only glimpse agitated heads and a mass of heaving shoulders and arms. The nearer the ladies came to the dense knot of people the louder grew the agitated voices. More and more excited, the travellers looked at each other, and the younger, apparently gifted with a vivid imagination, exclaimed quite terrified: "Perhaps this means a revolution and we are going to be mixed up in it."

"What does this mean, coachman?" asked the elder of the ladies at last. By now they had come so close to the noisy group that her voice was barely audible.

Still the driver heard her question, for he halted his carriage at the very entrance of the street and directly in front of the yelling crowd. "Majale," he replied most calmly.

"For heaven's sake," cried the young lady, leaping up, "go on, coachman, go on. *Majale* means wild boar. Probably a wild boar has

escaped and might even jump into the carriage! Oh, please, please drive on. He must have lost his senses."

But the coachman, far from frightened, continued to sit calmly on his seat, watching the shouting, pushing, and yelling mass with great delight. As the young lady had in her terror forgotten to give her commands in Italian, he did not budge, and instead watched the procedures in perfect composure.

"Please talk to him in Italian and tell him to save us all," cried the young girl.

But at that moment a small brown-eyed lad jumped with the greatest agility upon their carriage step. He held a very curious object on the flat of a knife, which he offered to the ladies, nodding his head the while in a most friendly fashion and repeating several times, "Would the ladies like some majale?"

"Have you ever in your life seen anything equal to this?" the amazed young girl said to her companion. "Is this majale then? What can it all mean?"

Her companion had meanwhile carefully

examined the greenish object lying on the flat of the knife. It smelt strongly of laurel, peppermint, clove, and manifold other spices. "I think it is a piece of wild boar's meat, prepared with various spices," she explained. "But I like the charming boy still better than his curious offering. Just look how brown he is, the bright little fellow!"

As the ladies were still holding back, the lad encouraged them with the most friendly face in the world. "You needn't pay for it," he said, "but please try our majale."

Of course, the ladies had not been afraid to pay. The truth was the curious green meat had frightened them, and only when the boy once more urged them, not only with words but with his eyes and gestures, each lady took a slice of majale from his knife and ate it. This seemed exactly what he wanted, for without waiting for their thanks he leaped from the carriage and was swallowed by the crowd. The coachman apparently saw no further use in tarrying, for he cracked his whip violently

and simply tore up the street towards the Hotel Roma.

Here the stately proprietor, Vittario Pagani, stepped solemnly out of his hall and up to the carriage in order to help the ladies out himself. They had ordered rooms for a whole month, for the hotel had the best reputation in those parts.

First, Mr. Pagani, in full dignity, attended to the ladies. Then, turning to the coachman, he said with a slight reproach in his voice: "Why did you come so late from the station? Has anything happened?"

"No, sir," replied the young man, "but we stopped a while at the Trattoria of St. Paul's. It is Majale-day."

By this time the ladies had entered the hall. Conducted by Mr. Pagani and followed by some porters, they went upstairs to the two rooms they were to occupy, which were connected by a door. Each had a little balcony of its own with a view far out over the Campagna to a green strip of ocean.

Both ladies immediately stepped out on

their balcony, obviously delighted with their new abode. As the blooming young girl stood there, she had an air of welcoming any adventure which might present itself. Our fair-haired girl, whose name was Helmina von Trolley, was the daughter of a landed proprietor in Meklenburg. For years she had begged her parents to take her to Italy, but her mother had found it too far to go, while her father had objected to the hot climate. Her prayers had therefore been in vain till an intimate family friend, Miss Clara Hellweg, had decided to go to Italy, declaring herself ready to take Helmina with her. Thus the journey had been undertaken and had proved most successful up to this point. Helmina now went to the other balcony, where Clara was feasting her eyes on the lovely landscape.

“I know that trattoria means eating house, but how can it be called after St. Paul?” asked Helmina. “I’d like to know where this trattoria is. According to our coachman we stopped there.”

Clara could give no information. Curious

as to the name of the inn, she suggested going back immediately after lunch. Then they could closely examine the spot as well as the cause of the tumult. Above everything else the delightful lad gave them a good excuse, for if such polite and pleasant people were among the crowd, it could be nothing dangerous despite the great noise they made. Helmina highly approved of this resolution, for her fears of live boars and revolutions had been dispelled long ago. The ladies then made further plans for their first day in Albano till the lunch-bell called them both downstairs.

CHAPTER II

PEPPINO AND HIS MOTHER

ALL THIS time the tumult we have spoken of had increased. The steep little street where it was taking place was called St. Paul's Street, after the beautiful old Church of St. Paul, which stood at its end, and the same was true of the eating place.

More and more people kept assembling here, that brilliant September morning. At last the people formed a solid wall, and nobody from outside could have guessed what was the centre of attraction. But if anybody did fight his way through, he was well rewarded by the most pleasant sight of a table planted in the middle, gleaming and sparkling with most inviting objects.

Bright bottles ornamented with green and red ribbons contained Albania wine, which glowed a rich red in the sunshine, and delicious-looking rolls lay strewn about among the

bottles. In the middle lay a neat white plate with rosy radishes and onions. Everything looked so orderly and clean that it resembled a garden full of primroses and tulips with a rose-bed in the middle. On a smaller table beside the large one was a large wooden platter with a large cut of roast meat of a curiously changeable color varying from reddish green to gray. This was the highly prized and world-renowned majale.

Behind the table stood a tall, stately woman. Her head, proudly poised on her shoulders, was wound about with heavy braids of coal-black hair, and her mouth was tightly shut. She did not utter a single word to anyone, and only when the pushing crowd got too noisy did she send her glance in that direction. This at once restored a certain peace and calmed down the agitation. In her dark eyes seemed clearly written the fact that she was fully able to take care of herself, even if the crowd got wild. She cut off one piece of the roast after another with her large, sharp knife, measuring each carefully with her eyes.

Somehow the pieces vanished, yet nobody had come too close or pushed the little table about, something the woman would not permit. The little rolls also quickly disappeared from the large table and were always immediately replaced. There was absolutely no disorder; no dirty glasses ever stood about, though constant eating and drinking was going on and everybody obtained what he wanted. It is true that some of the noisiest did not eat or drink, for their intention was just to see what was going on and to be in the midst of the jollity. But whoever observed things closely could see that the crowd was chiefly served by a slight dark lad, who, cleverly dodging among the people, took and brought everything that was needed. Three cups were constantly circulating, for the wine was not bought by the bottle. Everybody just wished for a glass, and as soon as the cup came back empty, the boy washed it in a bucket on the ground and rapidly filled it again.

This went on for an hour, the confusion and yells increasing as the hungry crowd grew big-

ger. But after a time a large part of the people detached themselves in order to climb up to the height towards the Church of St. Paul. Whole processions were gathered near the church or climbed up higher still.

Gradually the ranks around the table thinned, though the lad still had plenty to do. While he was running about among the customers somebody pulled him by the sleeve and he turned about.

“Come, Peppino,” cried a boy, who found himself at once pushed aside by a customer, “I came to fetch you. Loads of people are up there already. I have seen everything.”

Peppino turned about. “Can’t you see that I don’t have time?” he called, dashing away.

For a moment the boy stood still, staring after the industrious one with unbelieving eyes. Then making his way to Peppino’s side by the aid of pushing his head and shoulders, he grasped the lad’s sleeve and did not let him go.

“Don’t be stupid, Peppino! Listen to me! I was up there already and imagine, the whole floor of the church is covered with myrtle. They had begun singing and though they were only practising, I know you would have liked to have heard it.”

Peppino, who was standing beside the bucket, could not break loose, despite the greatest exertion, for he was a slender lad and the other a thick-set, broad fellow, though both had just lately finished their tenth year.

These last words apparently made a deep impression upon Peppino. Not even trying to escape, he said sadly, “You’d better go without me, Neo. You don’t need me. You can see for yourself that I can’t go. I have no time.”

“No time!” mocked Neo. “All you have to do is to run away. Then you’ll have time enough.”

“Oh,” cried Peppino incensed, “and who is to do the work then?”

“Your mother can do it. Yes, why not? There she stands, and I don’t see why she has

to tie you down forever to work she can do herself."

Peppino's cheeks grew crimson.

"You are nothing but a scoundrel, Neo," he cried in a boiling rage.

With this he turned his back and quickly slipped towards the other end of the table, where a man was holding up two fingers for a sign that he wanted two pieces of majale. Peppino lifted his index finger as a sign that he had understood. These signs made it possible for customers to give their orders even in the greatest noise and confusion and for Peppino to indicate he was coming.

This time the answer had not come so promptly as usual and the mother had noticed it. But all she did was to glance towards her boy without losing her composure or saying one word. She was as sure of her Peppino as of her own eyes. And indeed he was once more at his post and the business ran as smoothly as before.

More and more people wandered by, and once in a while somebody would call out,

“Aren’t you coming, too, Peppino? Come along with us.”

Another of Peppino’s friends had stopped close to him and called, “Why do you stand here waiting, Peppino? Come along; they are going to send off a large balloon with lights.”

At this Peppino turned his face away, for his heart had grown suddenly heavy. It was not just the balloon which drew him away with the other boys. No, it was not just the keen entertainment that they all looked forward to. The most beautiful memories that the boy knew were connected with this day, and he thought to himself, “If only it were still as in old times.”

To-day the feast of the Madonna was to be celebrated in the little church of the Capuchins, and the feast was soon to begin. In former years he had always stood expectantly at the door waiting for his mother, who had then always gone up with the rest. She had not been obliged to work in those times, for his father had stood at the table cutting majale and pouring the wine. Though the business

had been theirs ever since Peppino could remember, his mother had not been tied to it then. She had dearly loved to go to church on feast days. After waiting a while, his mother used to step out of the house, and she was splendid to look at. She had spread a white cloth over her head, which, falling down in the back, revealed her black gleaming braids over her forehead. Her eyes sparkled, the red coral in her ears and on her neck shone, and her red bodice and shawl were curiously beautiful. She would then take Peppino's hand and they would join the crowd, the boy's heart swelling with pride at being able to walk beside his beautiful mother.

Up on the height the road turns off towards the left. Here it would be deliciously cool under the fine old oak trees. Further on they would come to an open square from which one could see the sparkling lake. Here by the evergreen oak they entered the church beside the old convent. However, it was all over now and Peppino did not wish to think further, for the best of all had come then, the song of the

Capuchin monks beside their organ. Oh, they sang so beautifully! Now he would never be able to hear them any more.

Two years ago his father had died, and whenever Peppino had asked his mother if they were not going along to the church, she had always answered, "You see father isn't here to serve them and I must do it myself." Neither had he seen his mother wear the corals and the red bodice since then, and on her head she had now a black cloth instead of the white one.

Most of the crowd had dispersed and yet several were still standing at the table. Despite his heavy thoughts Peppino ran quickly to and fro, for he always remained nimble on his feet. Suddenly the mother beckoned to him and said hurriedly, "Come, Peppino, you must still see a little of the feast." Both seized the table and lifted it inside the door, covered as it was with bottles and everything else. The door was locked and the key was slipped into her pocket. Holding her boy's hand, the widow Bertolini proceeded up the hill.

Peppino felt as if he were dreaming. Was it possible that he was going up to the feast at the very moment when he had given it up for good. Already they had passed St. Paul's Church and saw from afar the tops of the old oak trees. They reached the convent and went through the open church door. A few steps forward and the mother knelt down in a dark corner, drawing Peppino to his knees also. The boy was simply filled with wonder; a miracle seemed to be before him. Many women and girls with white head-cloths and red bodices were prostrate on their knees, just as he had remembered them. Myrtle covered the floor, giving forth a pungent perfume, and the whole church was filled with clouds of incense. As soon as the monks began to sing, Peppino's troubles vanished and his heart grew light. He was as happy as a human being can possibly be, for the monks' song was glorious and all the kneeling people looked absolutely at peace. The boy's heart filled with deep devotion and he quietly said the Lord's Prayer.

When the last sounds of the singing had

died away, the widow quietly got up and whispered to her boy: "Come now, we must go before the blessing."

That was a great blow, for Peppino felt like tarrying. But he knew it was to be. Unobserved, he and his mother slipped out and went rapidly along the oak walk so that it seemed more like a flight than a walk. That was not the way they used to do in former times when his mother came out of the little church erect and conscious of her finery. Now she kneeled in a dark corner as if she didn't quite belong in the church.

They got as far as St. Paul's Church before he could give vent to his feelings.

"But mother," he said at last, "when I am big and am able to do everything father did, can't you go to the feast again the way you used to? Can't you get there at the beginning then with the others and stay and wait for the blessing? And afterwards come down slowly with the happy crowd?"

"Yes, Peppino, I'll be able to do it by that time," was the widow Bertolini's short reply.

“But mother,” Peppino began once more, “won’t you wear the corals and your red waist, too, and the white cloth?”

The woman smiled.

“Yes, they belong to the feast, it is true. But, Peppino, I’ll be old by then and I’ll look like old Cinoca.”

That was a fearful thought for the boy. Old, crooked Cinoca had deep wrinkles on her brow. He had always been afraid of her ever since he had been a little boy for she carried a huge stick. But his mother could never resemble her just the same, he knew that. However, he made a secret vow to himself that he would grow up as quickly as possible in order that his mother could again celebrate the feast days as in old times.

CHAPTER III

NEO APPEARS

AFTER lunch the two travellers were busy for a little while in their rooms. Then they set out in order to see some of the life in Albano. At the corner of St. Paul's Church, Helmina cried out, "The crowd was gathered here this morning and the curious trattoria must be here, too."

But they saw absolutely nothing there except a few stragglers in the street.

A thick-set lad with stiff hair was standing in the middle of the street and stared at the ladies. Going up to him, Helmina inquired, "Do you know where we can see the Trattoria of St. Paul's, boy? I'd like to know what it looks like," she said to her companion.

"Yes," said the boy.

"Well," said Helmina, "where is it?"

"Here," was the reply.

"Here?" repeated Helmina laughing, "but whereabouts?"

“Here,” once more came the answer.

“Then point it out to us with your finger,” commanded the young girl.

The boy pointed to the bare ground, where virtually nothing could be detected.

“I have never yet run across such an invisible inn,” Helmina burst out laughing. “Where do they pour out the wine, then? We can see nothing.”

“In church,” said the boy.

“What!” exclaimed Helmina, utterly amazed. “In church? You don’t mean to say you have a trattoria in church?”

“No,” replied the boy, still unperturbed.

“But what did you mean was in church, then?”

“The widow Bertolini.”

Helmina laughed aloud.

“When I inquire where the trattoria is he points to the ground and when I ask him where they pour out the wine he tells me about a widow being in church. What is your name, you marvel of a boy?”

“Neo,” replied the unkempt lad. Pointing

up towards St. Paul's Church he said suddenly, "Here she comes."

The ladies looked and Helmina cried, "Oh, here comes our delightful little friend from this morning, too. We must be in the right place, after all. The nice young boy will be able to give us some information, I am sure."

But the ladies found themselves obliged to wait for their information, for the widow Bertolini and her boy arrived and moved at once towards a door. It was quickly opened and a table appeared in the middle, laden with bottles and bread and a plate with majale. In the shortest time everything was once more in running order. The news of this spread at such lightning speed that a large crowd at once assembled, the ladies being at the very centre. They had to admit that the rough boy's words had some meaning after all, for the serving table stood on the very spot he had indicated, and the stately landlady who cut off the meat with such superior calm was without doubt the widow.

Helmina longed to engage the polite,

brown-eyed boy in conversation, but she realized that he had no time. Her eyes could hardly follow his quick feet about and he actually seemed to be every place at once. She also noticed that the rough boy followed him about and occasionally pulled his sleeve, but with no result whatever. The ladies now thought it best to leave and seek out the charming little fellow in some quiet hour. Helmina had the firm intention of employing the agile youngster for a guide, porter, and companion on divers expeditions they were planning for their stay.

While trying to disengage themselves from the centre of the crowd they were pushed towards the door from which the table had appeared. As the doors were open and Helmina could peep in, she saw a ground-floor room without a single window and only the doors for ventilation. A bed stood beside one wall and a little, wooden couch against the other. Some provisions for cooking could be seen in one corner, and a cupboard and a few chairs in the other. There was very little space

inside, so that the large serving-table on the street must have filled it up completely. Helmina had pointed out these details to her companion and both could not comprehend how this miserable little cellar-room could be the abode of the stately woman and her son. The whole affair of the curious business in the street interested them very much and they decided to do all they could to find out more about that unusual woman and her taking lad. Probably Mr. Pagani, who knew everyone in Albano, could tell them about the interesting pair.

CHAPTER IV

NEO'S FAMILY AND CIRCUMSTANCES

MAJALE-DAY, on which such lively business had been transacted by Peppino and his mother, was over and things went again on their accustomed round. Mrs. Bertolini sat under the door facing the street and sewed for long stretches of time without raising her eyes, no, not even when customers came to the table, for she knew that Peppino was there to attend to them. Only when the unkempt Neo would appear, she would look up from time to time, missing nothing that went on. Neo would plant himself immediately beside Peppino and stand there with his hands in the pockets of his ragged little coat. The table with the bright-colored bottles was in its place, and between it and the door Peppino sat on a stool, his fingers busy plaiting a straw basket. His mother had taught him this work and she also would occupy herself with it when she was

through mending all the holes in her son's coat and trousers. Now and then someone would stop and purchase an onion and some bread, possibly even a modest drink, and Peppino would quickly serve them. When in that fashion the day had drawn to a close and the evening bell began to ring, the widow Bertolini would get up and exclaim, "Come, Peppino, it is time for evening prayers," and straightway the two would start out towards St. Mary's. After kneeling piously, they would join in the singing of the throng, and Peppino's zeal was always so great that his heart was filled with joy. These prayers with his mother always seemed to him by far the best part of the day.

Neo, ever ragged and idle, would appear daily and stand beside Peppino, managing to keep well away from the widow, whose glances he rather dreaded. Neo had always plenty of things to tell Peppino, but either from sheer laziness or an inability to express himself properly he only half finished his words and sentences. Neo would spend hours staring motionless at Peppino. His clothes hung in

rags, and his face was encrusted with dirt. One might have thought that Neo did not find the leisure to wash his face even once a day, whereas he really never had anything to do. Mrs. Bertolini did not care for this boy very much, for Peppino could learn nothing good from him. Nobody wished to have anything to do with Neo's father, indeed, no one even knew what his occupation was. Sometimes he would go about with a bundle on his back, declaring that he was selling wares in the neighborhood. But nobody ever knew what he carried in the sack. Then he would go off towards Marino with a covered cart, saying he had started a business with a friend there, and again nobody ever could trace his business. He was frequently seen standing at street corners, like his son, with his hands in his torn trouser-pockets, and he was never absent when there were altercations or disagreements. He always proved an eager listener on such occasions. Everybody in Albano knew cross-eyed Mateo, for he was seen everywhere despite his divers occupations. His wife had been dead a long

while and he and his boy lived alone in the outskirts of Albano in the direction of Marino, in a little tumble-down building which might once have been a house but looked now more like a goat-stable. The son had also been christened Mateo and as a small lad had been called Matineo. This for the sake of shortness had been corrupted to his present name.

CHAPTER V

MR. PAGANI SPEAKS AS A ROMAN

SEVERAL dull days had followed the beautiful evening of the Madonna festival, and the two ladies at the Hotel Roma had taken only a few short walks in the neighborhood. They had strolled to the quiet blue lake and several times to the friendly little church and its open square in front with the gorgeous spreading oak tree. Now they were waiting for a bright sunny day to go on a longer expedition.

The ladies had stopped several times near Peppino and his mother. Mrs. Bertolini was always polite but so sparing with her words that she did not give Helmina the slightest opportunity to get into a more intimate conversation. The active small boy with the intelligent eyes pleased her more each time she saw him. She had laid a plan to engage Peppino as guide for a whole day's trip and had asked the widow if she would let him accompany

them. The widow had assented with the remark that Peppino knew the roads well and could guide the ladies if they did not go too far, but as he was still so young, he must always be back for the Ave Maria in the evening.

When the Sirocco* had blown itself out, a brilliant deep blue sky at last promised a spell of splendid weather. Helmina rejoiced on her balcony, exclaiming, "Now we can really have a trip!" Mr. Pagani stood below, examining the sky with a look of satisfaction on his face. She found this a propitious moment for a consultation with him on several subjects. The astonished Clara was suddenly taken by the arm and whisked downstairs. Mr. Pagani greeted the ladies in a very solemn fashion, and sending a victorious look at the clear firmament, declared, "Now we can be sure of good weather."

The ladies consulted their host about the ways and means to carry out several of their projects, and he advised them to seek out a

* Hot wind.

reliable donkey-driver, whose stand was at a street corner not far from the hotel. Mr. Pagani also gave the ladies hints of where to go and where not to go, matters they had already settled for themselves. Helmina now changed the subject of conversation and expressed her interest in Mrs. Bertolini, her curious business and miserable abode, wondering how a woman who looked like a descendant of Roman emperors could be in such poor circumstances.

“Oh,” said Mr. Pagani, smiling and joyfully stroking his black whiskers as if he were pocketing a compliment for himself. “I can see that the ladies have really noticed how the matter stands. I am just the person to tell you everything, for I know almost everything that goes on in Albano,” he continued with an air of importance. “My ladies, you have guessed correctly; the widow Bertolini is not from these parts. You see, she is a Roman just as I am, and we two are the only Romans in Albano. That fact is a key to her whole appearance. You must know that the widow has not

always lived the way she does now. Indeed, she has seen better days. Bertolini, her husband, was a good-looking, splendid man and full of resources and cleverness. You should have seen the woman in those days setting out at the side of her husband. There was not a taller pair in Albano nor a handsomer. She knew how to dress, I can tell you, and her husband wanted her to look well. He owned the most flourishing business in the town, for in his hands everything just naturally prospered. He kept the majale table just for pleasure, for he was a sociable man, and everybody would assemble in his house for a bite of majale and a sip of wine. We had many good talks around his table as I know from authority, for I often joined my friends there. And just think what happened. A fever seized him and carried him off in three days. Yes, and he the strongest of us all."

Here Mr. Pagani paused a little, but before Helmina could utter the question forming on her tongue, the innkeeper, having divined it, answered: "You want to ask why Bertolini's

widow did not carry on her husband's flourishing trade. Yes, why not, indeed! The man had hardly closed his eyes when a whole crowd of relations appeared with divers claims. One was supposed to have his money tied up in the business, another had joined her husband in some of his speculations, and a third declared he had already taken over half of the business. This is what they said, at least, and all united against her and declared she had no more right whatever to the business. Being a stranger here, she had no one to stand up for her, especially as they seemed to prove that she had no claims. Only the majale table remained to her, and the unfortunate woman was told to be glad of that good business. She had to leave the house where she had lived with her husband, because she could not keep it up. Not wishing to leave St. Paul's Street, she found the hole where she is now, just a few doorways further down. Here the woman lives, and yet how do you think she took it? From the very hour she was left a widow she ruled the majale table as if she had never been used to anything

better. She works from morning till evening and not a soul has ever heard a word of complaint from her. It is true, for she talks very little. She is different from most women. She thinks more than she says. When I went to see her the first time after her change of fortune she did not weep or whine as most women would. You know, most men can't stand that. No, setting down a chair for me in the doorway, she remarked, 'The place here is new, Mr. Pagani, but I hope our friendship hasn't changed.' Glancing about me at the cellar-like abode, I said, 'They did not leave you much, Mrs. Bertolini.' Holding her little boy close to her side, she answered, 'Thank God, they did not take my greatest treasure from me.' That is the widow Bertolini for you, ladies."

"But do you think the woman can ever improve her circumstances with her present work?" asked Helmina, who, as well as her companion, had followed this tale with great interest.

Mr. Pagani shrugged his shoulders.

"Her business does not amount to very

much, but Mrs. Bertolini does some other work, too, and besides that she has a lot of plans. By the time the boy grows up, in case he turns out well, they may yet see better days together."

"By then they may both have perished in that miserable cellar. I don't see how they can live there in the rainy season when they can't be on the street!" Helmina seemed genuinely concerned.

"They always sit just inside the threshold, and I know they can't be very warm. Just the same, one will hear no complaints from the woman as one would from such as are born in rags and live by begging. No, she moves her fingers instead of her tongue; that keeps her warmer."

CHAPTER VI

A SECRET

DURING this long conversation the sun had not stood still but had proceeded to the point of setting. Helmina noticed this to her consternation, for they still had before them a long consultation with the donkey-driver. Turning abruptly from their landlord, the ladies went down the street. But Mr. Pagani was deeply concerned about his guests' welfare and anxious to have them in the right hands. He therefore called after them, pointing with his outstretched hand, "Look, ladies, Guiseppe stands over there at the corner of The Europe." Needless to say he did not mean the continent, but an old grey inn which stood a short distance beyond St. Paul's Church at the most populous point of Albano. Here a crowd of people was always gathered, and the noise here was continuous. Many yelled and waved their arms about at a rate which might make

one expect constant murders and assaults. But these meetings were of a most friendly character, and many of the men were just guides and donkey-drivers, talking over the gains they had made from the travellers in the city. When the ladies approached the fat Guiseppe, he stepped forward majestically, doffing his pointed hat nearly to the ground. He had a clear notion that the ladies had come for business. Helmina at once declared that they wanted two reliable donkeys for the morrow. They wanted to take a trip to Nemi and back and had come to ask Guiseppe for information regarding the road and the best way to get there.

Guiseppe recommended a fine road leading along the lake through Genzano. To vary the trip they might take a somewhat longer way home, which was somewhat solitary but no less beautiful. This path was shaded by thick trees and bushes, so that it formed a continuous arbor, through which not even a bit of sky peeped. The path was called "The Arbor."

Helmina, much taken by this description,

at once decided to choose that way home and settled that Guiseppe should bring the two donkeys to the Hotel Roma at ten o'clock the following morning. They would skirt the lake as far as Nemi and after a short halt would return by the shady path.

But Guiseppe did not find the matter quite so simple. If the ladies meant to start as late as ten o'clock, they would get back much later than he had calculated, for the second route was very long. He could not be their guide in that case, for he had already promised to take another party up Mount Cavo by moonlight, for which expedition he had to leave late in the afternoon. He opined, however, that a guide could easily be found. After turning to the group of bystanders he accosted a man standing at the front, a man with the roughest hair and such a squint that it was difficult to tell at what object he was looking and at what he was not.

"Couldn't you take them, Mateo? What do you think?" Guiseppe asked, nudging the man's elbow.

"I suppose I could," replied the man unpleasantly, his sombre eyes roving to and fro. "It wouldn't be the first time I've ever taken people on that road."

But Helmina, stepping up to Guiseppe, said with determination. "You needn't find a guide for us. We know somebody who is sure to know the road, too. We are going to take young Peppino."

"Yes, that boy knows the roads all right," remarked Guiseppe, "but it is a long distance home through the bushes and quite a way from the highway where people are about. Something might happen to the donkeys, and if you called for help, not a soul would be near you."

But the donkey ride held no terrors at all for the young girl. She gave the guide to understand that her mind was made up to employ Peppino. If he knew the way, she could easily manage the donkeys.

Guiseppe also seemed satisfied and admitted that a boy was frequently brighter in finding his way than a grown-up person. Peppino

probably knew the hazel bushes well from roaming about those thickets.

When the donkeys were definitely engaged, the ladies went to St. Paul's Street to look for young Peppino. The mother had just risen to set out with her boy to evening prayers, and she did not look as if she meant to be deterred from her purpose. Mrs. Bertolini gave her consent on the condition that Peppino was to be back in time for prayers, which promise was given. When the ladies returned to their hotel, their mood was one of high expectations for the coming day.

The following morning Peppino was busy earlier than usual on his basket. He saw a most happy day before him, for nothing pleased Peppino better than to go to the country and take a walk beside the lake and through the bushes. And he was to have a whole day of such pleasure! Neo, who was about early, too, came strolling down the street, when he suddenly caught sight of something which seemed to attract him. He came

up to the table behind which Peppino sat and stretched his neck in order to see it better.

"Give me that big onion," he said to Peppino with a motion of his hand.

"Leave it alone," Peppino said at once, so loudly that Neo drew back in terror. But his fright was soon gone.

"How stupid you are, Peppino," cried Neo. "You needn't frighten me, for you would be only too glad to know what I know, and I'll only tell you if you give me the onion."

"I don't care what you know," said Peppino proudly, "and you won't get the onion."

"You don't care," mocked Neo, "just because you don't know. And you are pretty stupid not to care, for it has to do with you. If you knew what it is, you would want to know all right."

Peppino made no reply.

"Will you give me the onion if I tell you?"

"No."

"Then what will you give me?"

"Nothing."

"All right, then, you needn't know," cried

Neo, infuriated. But the habit of telling Peppino everything was so strong with him that he found it dreadfully difficult to keep this piece of information to himself. Also he wished to profit by the matter. At last a new idea dawned upon him.

“Peppino,” he commenced again, “it is a secret, but I’ll tell you if you bring me all the nuts you find in the bushes. Will you do it?”

“Yes, then tell me the secret,” Peppino at last retorted. “Who told you?”

Meanwhile Peppino’s mother had settled down to some work in her doorway. After a glance at her, Neo came close to Peppino and whispered a long while into the latter’s ear.

“Peppino,” said the mother, “if you want to finish your work by ten o’clock you have no time to lose. And Neo, look, here comes your father. He probably needs you for some work.”

These words gave Neo a violent start, and he would have slipped around the street corner and disappeared, had not his father seen him. Summoned by a shrill whistle, the boy turned again and reluctantly went up to his father.

Then both disappeared together. Not more than half an hour later, however, Neo came dashing up to his friend once more. Despite the fact that the mother had just gone indoors, Neo spoke to Peppino in a low whisper. He seemed most genuinely concerned and finally repeated three times over, "Now promise it again, please promise and give me your hand, too."

Peppino, obeying, gave his hand, for he could not help pitying the trembling lad, who looked more uncared for and wilder than ever now that his composure was gone. Shaking with terror, he sent anxious glances from right to left.

When Peppino had given his promise for the third time and Neo had gone, Mrs. Bertolini came out with Peppino's best coat, which he was to wear for the expedition. It was nearly ten o'clock and time to start. With sparkling eyes Peppino set out and arrived at the Hotel Roma simultaneously with the trotting donkeys.

CHAPTER VII

AN ODD TRAVELLING COMPANION

THE ladies, who had been waiting, mounted their donkeys at once. The animals had quite a proud air as they trotted down the sunny street towards the wooded slopes of Ariccia. Peppino ran gaily beside them, holding a long stick with which to urge on the beasts. But most of the time he talked to them affectionately. In this fashion the gay little group arrived at the foot of the slope which climbs up towards Genziano. Here the donkeys changed their pace into a comfortable walk, and Peppino, laying his stick on his shoulder like a resting warrior, took immense steps in order to keep up with them.

Helmina had been greatly pleased by the fiery zeal the boy was showing, and as they were climbing at a moderate pace, she could at last engage Peppino in conversation. She beckoned him to walk beside her, for the don-

keys knew the road well and needed no guidance here.

“Tell me, Peppino,” she began, “where do you sleep?”

“In my bed,” replied Peppino promptly.

“I mean in which room, for I only saw one bed there. Don’t you live in the ground-floor room, Peppino? I didn’t see anything in the place except a few wooden planks, a cooking stove and a wardrobe.”

“That is all we have,” said Peppino seriously. “In the evening mother lays my mattress on the planks. When the majale table stands inside, there wouldn’t be room for another bed.”

“Where do you keep the wine to fill up the beautiful bottles when they are empty?”

“Beside the stove is a hole where we keep a barrel, and we hide it with an old shutter. And in the wardrobe mother has all our clothes, but she never takes out the beautiful ones since we live down there. Everything is so changed now, but it won’t be for very long.”

Peppino’s eyes gleamed as he said these

last words, and his voice vibrated from inner agitation.

“Why won’t it be that way for long, Peppino?” asked Helmina.

“Because I’ll soon be a man. Then mother won’t have to live that way any longer. I know quite well what I mean to do then. It will be in two or three years, I guess.”

“How old are you now, Peppino.”

“Ten.”

“And what do you mean to do when you are a man of thirteen?”

“I’ll carry out mother’s plan, and she won’t have to work so hard any longer. She’ll never need to work in the evenings then when the door is shut and nobody else is working.”

“What are your mother’s plans, Peppino?”

“I won’t tell any one in Albano, for mother says that one must never speak of what one means to do, otherwise others do it while one speaks of it even. She doesn’t tell any one, either. But perhaps I might tell you.”

Peppino had quickly realized with whom

he had to deal, and Helmina's friendly glances had clearly shown her good intentions.

"Why won't you tell me, Peppino?" Helmina went on. "I won't repeat it to a soul here."

"Yes, I'll tell you," the lad declared, and taking the stick from his shoulder, he used it as a prop. Leaning on this firm support, he felt his thoughts take better shape.

He began: "Our cousin Philipppo now has the business father used to own and he travels about a lot. Mother says that it isn't worth as much as when father owned it and that he would give it back to mother if we gave him money for it. But mother hasn't any money. She'd love to have the business back, for she doesn't enjoy the majale table on account of the many noisy people who come and go in a way mother doesn't like. Mother is working dreadfully hard, for she wants to earn enough money to buy the business back. If she hasn't enough in two or at most three years, I'll be able to say a word, too, for I'll be a man then. I'll have learned something by then. Mother

has already talked to Father Benedetto at the Capuchin convent, and he is going to let me come up on rainy days and sometimes very early in the morning. He is going to teach me arithmetic and writing, for I'll need that for the business. And when we have the business back, we'll move out of the dark hole and back into the house where we lived when father was alive. Then mother will look again as in former times, and she'll be happy, too."

Peppino had become more and more absorbed in this glowing vision, his face shone and he was nearly running. The donkeys and everything about him were completely forgotten.

"I wish you could be a man as soon as that, dear, kind boy," Helmina sighed with compassion.

This roused the boy and brought him back from his imaginings to reality. He suddenly stood still. The donkey behind him, following most obediently, had climbed quite briskly up to now. But when the boy stopped, both donkeys stood still.

During Peppino's eager speech the two ladies had quite forgotten to look about them, and it was lucky they had stopped just then. The deep blue Nemi lake lay at their feet while Genzano, now far behind them, stretched sparkling from the mountain slope to the lake. On a rocky wall high above was the little town of Nemi, with its solid, weathered castle.

Next the little company started out on a beautiful narrow path skirting the mountain side as far as Nemi and affording the most gorgeous view of the lake and the high banks of Genzano opposite.

Soon after, they reached their journey's end. At the small stone steps of the inn the ladies left their donkeys and climbed up to an embowered veranda. Here also the view over the lake was lovely, and through the hanging grape-vines on the roof the sun made an exquisite pattern on the stone floor. The table was laid with a bottle of sparkling wine and a plate with golden grapes, a large slice of white, most inviting cheese as well as a round loaf of bread, which looked as if the innkeeper's wife had

only just taken it out of the oven. Smiling, the latter stood at the open kitchen, watching the effect of her preparations upon the two visitors.

Upon entering, Helmina exclaimed for joy, for to sit in this lovely arbor and enjoy the sunny prospect before her was a perfect treat. How delightful to have a pleasant meal in this delicious air! She at once beckoned to Peppino, who was standing below beside the donkeys. He modestly obeyed her summons, stopping shyly on the stairs.

“Come, Peppino, and sit down beside me,” Helmina called, “we are all going to have a nice dinner.”

The boy still hesitated, then glanced at the landlady, wondering if she would approve of his sitting down beside the lady. Whenever Peppino was in doubt, he always turned to his mother for advice. In her absence the landlady might give him aid. The woman understood the boy's glance at once, for nodding to him kindly, she said, “You struck it about right to-day, Peppino, it seems to me. Don't

be afraid to sit down beside the lady if she invites you to."

When Peppino had settled down, Helmina placed before him a huge piece of brown bread and a large piece of cheese. To this she added a glass of wine. Peppino, hungry from his long morning walk, set gaily to. Everything looked so inviting. The ladies also ate with a good appetite, all the while enjoying the view of the beautiful lake before them, and the old hoary castle with its solid towers. But after a time Peppino got up, politely thanking them for his food, and they remembered that they must not tarry on account of the long road back. Therefore Helmina said, "Go and get the donkeys ready, Peppino, while we go ahead on foot as far as the castle. Our path leading home goes right by it."

"The other road is much more beautiful," said Peppino.

"That may be, but we came that way and we want to see the other, too."

"The road by the lake is a much better road

and it would be better to go back that way," suggested Peppino.

"No, no," laughed Helmina, "we expect to take the other one. What do you mean by trying to change our plan, Peppino? I do not understand."

"The road through the bushes is often dreadfully damp and marshy," Peppino declared in a pitiful manner.

"What is the matter with him, Clara? Can you understand how he can suddenly be so obstinate?" asked Helmina of her companion, quite upset. "He was so pleasant up till now."

"Perhaps he is too tired to take that long road back," suggested Clara.

"Oh, no, he runs along as lightly as a deer; it can't be that," said Helmina. "But we shall see who is going to be master here, you obstinate little fellow."

Turning to the boy, she asked, "I want to know if you are going to take us home through the arbor or not, Peppino?"

"The other road is so much prettier, and

the donkeys can walk it much better," was the lad's reply.

"What do you mean by better, you wilful boy? Those donkeys walk so slowly and surely that one needn't fear anything from them even at the most dangerous places. But you haven't answered me if you are going to take us home through the bushes or not, Peppino."

"That road is often very wet and the donkeys might slip," Peppino persisted. He did not look up in his usual care-free manner. Instead his eyes were on the ground and his voice was shaking.

"I can't understand what ails him," exclaimed Helmina. "Perhaps somebody else can. Now listen to me, Peppino. We have absolutely decided to ride home through the bushes, and we are not going to change our minds. If you come with us, everything will be all right; in case you won't come, we are going by ourselves. We'll be able to find the way all right, for we can ask if we meet somebody. But I want to tell you that I never expected you to be so stubborn. I had such confidence in you

that I chose you among the other guides. Why do you repay me like that? It isn't nice of you, Peppino, really."

Peppino had grown pale during the girl's speech. Not saying a word, he suddenly ran away. As soon as he was gone Helmina once more gave vent to her anger and disappointment about the boy, for whom she had begun to feel quite an affection. It pained her greatly to lose the good opinion she had had of him and to see him so changeable and obstinate.

Clara tried to soothe her friend by saying how young Peppino was. He might be tired or troubled by some childish imaginings. There was no use to condemn him at once or give him up for that little whim. But Helmina, looking out over the lake, remained firm in her opinion.

Meanwhile Peppino had quickly run down a little footpath towards the lake. Here stood a little house among some trees where lived the long Gasparo, a youth known by everybody. Peppino had often seen him at the majale table on feast and market days. Gasparo had the

reputation of having the longest arms and legs one could find, and they were as hard as wooden clubs. Though he was far from clever, no one cared to get into a dispute with Gasparo, for whoever had an encounter with him suffered from bruises for at least a month and never crossed his path again. Gasparo's favorite conversation was always about fighting, his chief delight in life.

When Peppino paused at the little house, Gasparo had a large cudgel in his hand with which he had just hammered something into the ground behind his house.

"Will you do something for a tip, Gasparo?" began Peppino.

"Of course, I will," replied Gasparo, "but why do you look as if someone were going to beat you? Or have you just been beaten?"

"No, no," Peppino spoke up. "I came here with two ladies on donkeys, and they want to go back by the arbor-path. You see, I can't go. If you'll go with them, Gasparo, I'll give you all my earnings for the day."

"I'll go," said Gasparo, throwing his cudgel aside.

"Come, then."

As Gasparo owned only one shirt, one pair of trousers and one coat he lost no time by changing his garments. When they reached the inn where the donkeys were standing, Gasparo, who till now had only thought of his chance of earning some money, suddenly found the affair rather puzzling.

"Why don't you go and earn the tip yourself?" he inquired, with wondering eyes, his mouth wide open.

"I can't," said the boy in a state of visible agitation. The moment had come when after giving up the donkeys he would see the ladies depart in the direction of the bushes.

"Why can't you?" Gasparo inquired further.

The inner agitation Peppino had been able to control till now suddenly overpowered him with its vehemence. Throwing himself face downward on the ground, he wailed, "I can't, I can't."

"If you can't, you must have a thorn in your foot," remarked Gasparo. "Get up and I'll pull it out."

"No, no," groaned Peppino, his face pressed deeper into the ground.

Just then Helmina's voice was heard from the bower above. "Is everything ready, Peppino? We'll go this moment, whether you come or not."

Long Gasparo climbed up the stairs and presented himself to the astonished women.

"He is lying on the ground," said Gasparo, without further introduction. "He has a thorn in his foot and can't go. But I'll take you and the donkeys back through the bushes for a tip."

If the ladies were amazed at the sight of Gasparo's long legs and arms, they were still more so at his speech.

"Oh, is that the reason for his obstinate refusal," cried Helmina. "Poor little fellow! I guess he has great pain! But why didn't he tell us? We must do something for him."

Helmina ran down the steps. Clara followed and Gasparo came stumbling on behind.

Peppino still lay on the ground and did not move.

“Come, Peppino, show me your thorn; perhaps we can help you,” Helmina said compassionately. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Peppino uttered the most pitiful groans, but did not move.

“Now, we better go,” said the long Gasparo, taking the donkeys’ bridles and stepping up as close as possible to the ladies.

“I really think we had better do what this goblin bids us,” said Clara. “We must not lose any more time, for we don’t want to travel the lonely road by night. I’ll beg the landlady to look after Peppino. She is sure to help him.”

Since Gasparo, monkey-like and encrusted with dirt, had appeared, Helmina had lost all desire to go back through the arbor path. Moreover, it must be difficult to find their way alone, or Peppino would not have fetched a guide.

“I don’t care about taking that other road any more, Clara, and if you agree, we’ll go home the same way again. After all, we prom-

ised to get Peppino back before dark, and I know how we'll manage."

Clara was willing and Helmina, pulling out a note, handed it to Gasparo. "Take this for a tip," she said, "and now you can go."

Overcome by amazement, Gasparo's face lost every expression of intelligence it ever had had. But he must have understood the situation, for he let go of the donkeys. "All right, then," he said. "And Peppino, listen! After the *Ave* go backwards out of the church, and then say three times in the doorway, 'Thorn, go into the hole!' That will cure you and the thorn will come out." With this he went his way.

"Get up, Peppino," said Helmina firmly. "We are not going home through the bushes but by way of Genzano. I'll walk and you can ride my donkey."

No sooner had Helmina said these words than Peppino leaped to his feet like lightning and stood up firmly. Despite his pale face and his pitiful appearance, Helmina had to laugh when she saw him jump up like a Jack-in-the-Box.

"Show me your foot," she said. "Where does it hurt you?"

"It doesn't hurt me and I can walk," declared Peppino.

The ladies exchanged a glance of deep surprise.

"But Peppino," said Helmina in a reproving tone, "are you an actor? How can I have any more confidence in you?"

Peppino stood before them with a hanging head and looked so like a contrite sinner that Helmina could not keep her face straight. She burst out laughing repeatedly, even after she was sitting on her donkey and the whole company had started on their way home.

These outbursts of merriment finally proved contagious and Peppino's melancholy face began to brighten up a little, so that he ran beside the donkeys with a happier air. Sometimes Helmina would touch him lightly on the shoulder with her little whip, and he would start. "We'll have to come to a reckoning about this some day, Peppino," she warned him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET IS REVEALED

THE sun shone so brilliantly over the Campagna the following morning that Helmina woke up early. Also, she was still a little agitated from the experiences of the previous day.

Sitting straight up in bed, she called over to her friend in the next room, "Oh, Clara, it is a gorgeous morning; let's get up early to-day."

Clara agreed, and the two ladies lost no time. Soon they climbed up St. Paul's Street, where everything was quite still. Arrived on top, they had to stand still and give vent to their enthusiasm. A golden light lay on the lake, and the oak trees gleamed in the early morning sunshine. They wandered up as far as the convent of the Capuchins with its oak-shaded walk all still and deserted at this early hour. At the corner of the little church Helmina suddenly spied a little figure pressed

against the wall and leaning forward as if waiting for some one.

“Just look at that small, ragged boy!” exclaimed Helmina. “I wonder what he does here so early. Haven’t we seen him already?”

“Yes, we have, and several times, too,” said Clara. “It’s the boy who always keeps so close to Peppino. They call him Neo. For whom can he be waiting?”

Going a few steps further towards the lake, the ladies disappeared behind a tiny wayside shrine overlooking the lake. There was quite a number of such shrines here, all with stone benches in front. Settled down in this nook they had a gorgeous view and were quite hidden from the rear. They had been seated only a few minutes, when two voices at their very back started a violent altercation.

“You gave me away, you gave it all away,” said a boy in loud and furious accents. “You are a liar and a traitor. You told about it and it is all your fault.”

The other shrieked, “It isn’t true! It isn’t

true! You are ungrateful and it is a shame to spare you.”

First they took turns shouting, but as their heat grew greater, they both yelled at once.

“Do you know,” screamed the first, “my father is going to beat me dead to-night. He told me so this morning when he came home. He said he would finish me for telling you. Just then a neighbor came in, and I slipped away. Yes, and I came here to wait for you till you came out from Father Benedetto’s. But I tell you something, Peppino! I don’t see why I should get beaten and not you. I’ll see to it that you shall have yours, too. Father will find you all right.”

Peppino’s voice trembled from sheer anger. “Do you hear me, Neo?” he cried shrilly, “you are the greatest rascal in the world to talk to me like that when I went through so much yesterday because I had given you my promise. Do you think I’ll stand being beaten! No, I won’t! And now you’d better know for good and all that I won’t have anything more to do with you all my life. You are all a pack of

robbers. You rob and maltreat people, and I am glad if you are found out and locked up in a great and solid prison!"

"Did you hear that, Clara? What does it all mean?" said Helmina, appearing suddenly from behind the chapel. She was in a great state of excitement.

The moment the boys saw her they vanished like lightning and were gone.

"Did you hear it, Clara?" the girl repeated. "Do you remember that they told us that Albano was far from safe for travellers. Now you see! Even that dear and charming Peppino is consorting with a robber band. No, I won't stay here another day. They seem to be in league against us. Who knows if they are not spying upon us from behind these oak trees even, meaning to fall upon us right away?"

Helmina had worked herself into a great state of excitement and would not listen to Clara's soothing words. By now she was actually running and in this condition she reached the hotel. Here Mr. Pagani stood at the open door, airing himself as was his custom. Walk-

ing up to him briskly, Helmina said, "Mr. Pagani, please make out our bills, for we are going to leave early to-morrow."

"What? How?" cried the landlord in deep amazement. "But, my ladies, remember that you have rented your rooms for a month. So you want to leave my house after barely ten days?"

"We shall pay for the whole month, that is understood," Helmina said, "but we must leave to-morrow."

But Mr. Pagani was not waved aside as easily as that.

"Ladies," he began solemnly, for by that time Clara had come up, too, "I wish to know how we have failed towards you in my hotel. Has the service been bad, or have you lacked something you wanted? Please let me know where I have failed, for the honor of my house is worth much more to me than money. I am a Roman. Don't forget that."

"We find no fault at all with your hotel," Helmina reassured him, "but a robber band

seems to be lurking in these parts, and I won't stay here another day."

These words made a terrific impression upon Mr. Pagani, and he grew fairly green in the face from agitation.

"A band of thieves; a band of thieves!" he cried repeatedly. "That is a fiendish plot, an intrigue just to ruin me and my new hotel; yes, the good reputation of my house. But the people of Albano shall see what a Roman is. A band of robbers, indeed! Here on this spot, ladies, I swear to you that as I am a Roman I'll bring the whole hellish plot to light before the sun has set. Please, ladies, oblige me by telling me how you got this information which hurts and undermines the reputation of my hotel?"

Helmina related the conversation they had overheard, and Mr. Pagani grew thoughtful. Seemingly satisfied, he remarked at last, "It won't be hard to act as long as I have names. I'll keep my vow, and woe to the rascals if I find them out, for I'll put them in their places!

—yes, I, the Roman Pagani; and no one shall say that my hotel is in the neighborhood of thieves and rascals.”

As he talked, Mr. Pagani breathed hard with inner fury. After they left him, Helmina went straight to her room. Emptying all the chests and cupboards, she threw everything in a heap upon the floor. This with her was a preliminary to packing.

CHAPTER IX

THE HEARING

PANTING with rage, Mr. Pagani went straight to his servants' quarters. A moment afterwards a lad left the hotel and hastened down the long street of Albano. At the corner of St. Paul's Street he stopped. He had found what he was seeking. Waving violently to some one in the street, he cried, "Hey, there!" The widow Bertolini was peacefully sitting in her doorway, watching Peppino with a look of great satisfaction. He was plaiting his straw basket furiously, as if his life's work had to be finished that day. Behind Peppino the unkempt Neo stood as usual, but it was clear that Peppino turned his back on Neo. The other tried repeatedly to attract Peppino's attention. After the violent quarrel of the morning in front of Father Benedetto's door, Neo had found the time hanging heavily on his hands and he again sought his friend's com-

pany. The latter, however, kept his word, and Neo got no answer.

Neo was glancing idly about when the summons came. Rather glad of something to do, Neo came at once.

“Come with me quickly,” said the errand-boy, “master is waiting.”

“What do you want?” asked Neo, trotting along in order to keep up with the other.

“You’ll hear about it,” panted the hotel boy.

Mr. Pagani, looking very stern, stood in his hall below.

“Come in here,” he said to Neo, leading the way into a small, square chamber beside the dining-room. A wonderful sight met Neo’s eyes. On the little table stood a large dish full of macaroni with a high pyramid of tomato jelly, all giving out a warm, pleasant odor. Mr. Pagani led Neo to the table, saying, “Look at this and listen to me, young fellow. Your father did a rascally thing and you happen to know all about it. If you tell me everything from beginning to end, I’ll give you a fork and

you can eat all this. Also your father shall know nothing of it. But if you don't tell me or lie, I'll take you by the ears and we'll go to your father, you and I together, and I shall say to him: 'Mateo, beat your boy as he deserves.' And after that I mean to take you by the collar and take you where you belong. Now, what do you mean to do?"

Neo felt no struggle in the matter. Hadn't Mr. Pagani promised not to tell his father and offered him a reward besides?

"I'll tell it all," replied Neo.

"Then begin," said Mr. Pagani, and the boy began to tell what he knew in a much more coherent fashion than was his wont. From time to time he would look at the macaroni to see if it were still hot. This seemed to give him inspiration.

"In the evening," Neo began, "father told me to go to bed, but I didn't sleep, for I was thinking. I wondered what had made father's bag so big. Father made a light and came in and held it right to my eyes. But I kept them

closed and breathed very hard, and he thought I slept. Then he went to the other corner where the table stands, and I opened my eyes again. Then I knew what he had brought home, for he put four bottles on the table. Bartolo came in and they drank wine together. And next father brought out the two coats with the high collars which are always kept in the old chest. He used those once when the two young gentlemen were staying in the Hotel Europa. And he said to Bartolo, 'The ladies want to go to Nemi and they are coming home through the bushes. They have money and big gold chains, and they mean to take only the widow's ragged boy.' Then Bartolo said, 'We can do it best by the snake-marsh. But what shall we do with the boy there, for he'll shriek like a hyena?' And father said, 'I'll tame him all right. I'll gag his mouth and tie his hands on his back. Then I can throw him into the bushes and our work will soon be over.' And Bartolo said, 'We won't need to hurt them. They don't know us and they can't.

recognize us in our cloaks.' Then father said, 'If they shriek, I'll choke them with leaves and earth till they have had enough.' Before going Bartolo said at the door, 'Are you sure your boy is asleep?' And father answered, 'I saw to that, believe me, for he couldn't keep anything from that conceited young Peppino. But if he should happen to tell on me I'd beat him to death!' When father came to my bed again, I had my eyes closed. In the morning father was gone, and I went to Peppino and told him the secret and he promised to tell no one. But he didn't keep his promise. Father was away all day and the night too, and I slept alone. But when I stood in the doorway this morning father came home. 'You have told on me!' he said. 'Just wait till I pay you for this.' Just as he was going to lay down a large pack he carried, I began to scream and shriek till a neighbor came to inquire what he was doing to me. I didn't lose any time and slipped out between the neighbor's legs up to the convent. Here I waited till Peppino came, for it was mean of him to give the secret away. I told

him that he'd get beaten, too, to-night. Then a woman came and we ran away."

Neo took a deep breath after his exertion.

"That is fine, Neo, now set to work," said Mr. Pagani, pressing a fork into the boy's hand and moving a chair up to the table.

Neo set to so courageously and held out with such persistence that he did not rise from the table till the last flake of macaroni had disappeared from the dish. Mr. Pagani let him go and Neo wandered rather sluggishly down the street just as Peppino came running up with the errand-boy from the hotel. Neo, having done the same just an hour ago, thought to himself, "Peppino is pretty lucky to have his treat before him, while mine is all over." By this he meant the large, steaming dish he had just devoured.

Again Mr. Pagani stood in his hall below. When Peppino, politely taking off his cap, came up to the landlord, Mr. Pagani in a fatherly fashion laid his hand upon the boy's head. "Peppino, my son," he said, "we two know each other, don't we? for your mother is a

Roman, just as I am, and highly values her honor. I want to talk to you a little." With this he led the way into his own private room, where they could be safe from interruptions.

"I sent for you because I am trying to find out something, dear Peppino," said Mr. Pagani, "and don't be afraid of giving anything away, for I know everything about Mateo's rascally plot. Only just tell me now how you warned the ladies."

"I didn't say a single word, no, not a word," exclaimed Peppino, highly incensed, "for I had promised Neo not to. I thought the ladies wouldn't mind taking the same road back, if I told them that the other was bad and marshy. But they didn't want to change their plans and I got dreadfully frightened, for I couldn't say a word. I thought I should choke with fear when the ladies said they would go alone if I didn't come. In my fright I thought of long Gasparo and I fetched him, for he is such a good fighter. I thought he might be able to beat Mateo and the other. And then suddenly the ladies didn't want to go home through the bushes any more, but, of course,

they were angry with me and called me deceitful and had no more confidence in me. But just the same I was glad to be on the good road again, though they had lost all confidence in me. I knew they wouldn't be robbed here or thrown into the marsh as Mateo meant to do. I shall never have anything more to do with Neo; no, never, for he is a rascal and my mother never liked it when he came."

"That is right, my son, avoid bad company and follow your mother's advice. She is an honorable woman and deserves respect. She is a true-blooded Roman, boy, don't forget that."

Herewith Mr. Pagani parted from Peppino with marks of kindness and the boy ran back gaily to his mother. It was a great relief to tell her everything, for since Mr. Pagani knew it, it was no more a secret. It had been the first secret he had ever had from his mother.

As soon as Peppino left, Mr. Pagani sent a messenger to the ladies' rooms, begging for an interview. As all Helmina's belongings were lying on the floor, they preferred to see

Mr. Pagani in the dining-room downstairs. With a triumphant smile on his lips, Mr. Pagani told them that he had discovered the foul plot already and immediately proceeded to tell them the whole story. He laid great emphasis on Peppino's anxiety about the ladies and his excellent plan to call in the belligerent Gasparo. After having given his word, it had certainly been hard on the boy not to be able to tell them of their danger. He entreated the ladies to drop their groundless anxieties and not to hurt his hotel by leaving it before their time, for all Albano knew that they had come to stay a month. In return he would keep his vow and do his best to have the feared culprit locked up where he belonged.

As soon as Helmina knew the whole story and was assured of Mateo's disappearance, she was easily persuaded to remain, for since affairs had changed she had made several new plans. Clara herself had never wanted to leave, and so the conversation ended to everyone's satisfaction. Gratified and contented, Mr. Pagani took his leave.

CHAPTER X

NEW HAPPINESS

HELMINA returned at once to her room, but found no leisure yet to gather up her things. Running to Clara's room, she began to pace violently up and down. Had she done this in her own chamber she would have found herself enmeshed in a tangle of shawls, ribbons and lace collars. Her enthusiasm over her precious, darling Peppino knew no bounds. She was thrilled at her own good judgment of him. She had seen at once that he was a well-brought-up little fellow and charming, but who could have guessed his heroism and strength of character.

“Have you ever known the like, Clara?” Helmina exclaimed, delighted. “I scolded and mocked him, and he never said a word, in order not to become a traitor. And while I was angry with him and suspicious, he was so frightened for our sakes that he fetched that horrible

Gasparo to be our protector. But I know what I'll do. I know a way to reward Peppino, just wait."

Herewith she pulled the bell-rope so vigorously that the errand-boy, the porter and the chambermaid came rushing upstairs at once, for Mr. Pagani had called to them, "Run fast, that means either a fire or a fainting-fit."

But all Helmina wanted was just to have Peppino fetched at once. As the errand-boy had just done so a short time before, he wondered what was up. Peppino was just as astonished when the same message came again. After running along the street, he was taken across the hall and up four flights of stairs. Here Helmina stood at her threshold.

"My darling Peppino," she said, gently laying her arm around his neck, "I know now that you were not obstinate when you acted so oddly, and I know still more about you. I have such confidence in you now that I'd travel alone all across Italy with you. I know that you would keep any promise, even if it cost you the greatest sacrifice."

Peppino gazed up at her, the surprise on his face turning into joy, for he was glad to have his character cleared and Helmina's confidence restored.

"Listen, Peppino," the girl eagerly continued, "you did us a great service, and I want to do something for you now. You once spoke to me of your hopes of bettering your mother's circumstances by working very hard. Unfortunately I know that it would not take two or three years, but at least ten, till you accomplished anything like that, however hard you worked! But I have thought of another way. I have decided to take you home to my father's estate, where you can be our errand-boy and lackey, and when I go out driving with my ponies, you can stand at the back of the carriage in a fine blue coat trimmed with gold braid. My father will pay you a fine sum of money every year, for I know you'll work well and faithfully, and you can send it home to your mother, for I expect to give you absolutely everything you need. How will you like that? After three or four years we'll come back here

together. By that time you will have earned enough to give your mother what she longs for and you can stay with her for good. What do you think of my plan, Peppino? Will you come with us?"

Helmina had talked with such warmth and enthusiasm that she carried Peppino away with her, too. He gazed up at her with shining eyes and said, "Yes, yes, I'd like to very much. Can I go right away and tell my mother?"

"Of course. I'll go to see her to-morrow, for we must talk it all over. Tell her also that she must order a new dress for herself, for she must be dressed from top to toe the way she used to be. Remember, I mean to do this for her. Do you understand? She must have fine buttons, too, as all the women have. In two weeks everything must be ready, for we leave then."

Peppino in his happiness actually bounded along the street, on his way nearly upsetting old Cinoca, who was plodding along on her stick. He succeeded in avoiding her by a tremendous leap, which nearly upset his own bal-

ance. The old woman raised her finger and shouted to him across the street, "The greater the joy, the deeper the sorrow."

Her saying made no impression upon him, but he could not help remembering that his mother had said once that by the time she would be able to wear splendid clothes again, she would look like old Cinoca. And now his highest wishes were to be fulfilled, great happiness was coming. After leaping still higher than before he turned the corner sharply and rushed towards his mother so impetuously that any other woman would have been upset, chair and all. Mrs. Bertolini, however, did not lose her balance so easily. Overcome by the happy future he saw before his eyes, Peppino was hardly able to tell of his great good fortune. Only when he noticed that his mother did not say a word, he exclaimed in the middle of a speech, "But, mother, why don't you say something? Doesn't it please you more than anything that could have happened?"

"Does it please you more than anything on earth, Peppino?" inquired the mother.

“Of course, it does. Just think of the time when I come back again!” The more Peppino pictured their joyous future, the more intense grew his delight. It was clear that Helmina had completely won him over.

Folding her hands, something she very seldom did, and not uttering a word, Mrs. Bertolini looked into Peppino’s shining eyes.

Meanwhile, in order to give vent to her happy agitation, Helmina ran from the balcony to Clara’s room and back again. Her friend repaired to the girl’s room and at once set about replacing all the objects where they belonged. She had a premonition that they might stay in the middle of the floor for the next two weeks if she did not do so.

Early the following morning Helmina went to see Peppino’s mother, for she longed to talk the whole matter over. The ladies found Mrs. Bertolini very polite and most grateful for the kindness they were showing Peppino. At the same time she spoke only a few words in a very reserved manner and the conversation was over in no time. She thanked them very sincerely

for her new dress, adding how short the two weeks would be for fitting out Peppino, whose wardrobe was very scant.

But Helmina knew how to reassure her by promising to get Peppino everything he needed later. All he needed now was a travelling suit.

The matter was settled and a day set for their departure, but as the ladies intended staying in Albano till then, both parties would have plenty of opportunities to meet again.

CHAPTER XI

HAPPINESS FADES

THE following two weeks seemed dreadfully short to all our four friends, especially as they were the sunniest autumn days that had ever transfigured the little town. The two ladies regularly wandered up St. Paul's Street, then under the cool oaks as far as the Capuchin convent. Here they sat down by the little wayside chapel and gazed at the lake. This spot had grown on them daily and they had been quite satisfied to go no further. When they sat up there, the time seemed to fly and the evening always came before they realized it.

Mrs. Bertolini was dreadfully busy sewing these days and between times she glanced at her Peppino, letting her eyes rest on him for minutes on end. The days passed very fast for her.

Peppino was twisting and turning his baskets all day, and he showed much zeal, because

the last half-dozen he was to make before his journey had to be finished. He was glad to have plenty of days left, for after his first bit of enthusiasm Peppino had been troubled with various doubts. The day before his departure came at last, and while the boy once more settled down to his basket, his mother's affectionate glances often lingered on him. Noticing this, Peppino merely thought her glad of his opportunity to mend their circumstances and before long to be able to lead her back to their good old home.

After being silent all day, his mother said, toward evening, "Put on your best coat, Peppino, and go up to Father Benedetto and say good-bye. You must thank him for everything he has done for you."

The mother's voice shook a little as she said this and the curious, trembling tone gave Peppino a sensation almost like choking. After putting on his coat, he went along St. Paul's Street, by the church and up the height. The lake was shining in the evening sun and the whole scene was so beautiful that the boy could

not tear himself away. Sitting down on the ground, he looked out over the golden water as though he could never gaze his fill of the view before him. Was it really true that he was leaving and would not be sitting here for a long, long time, and nevermore be able to go up to Father Benedetto in the early morning when it was so cool and delicious here under the fine old oak trees—yes, and worst of all, not go home to his mother afterwards? To his mother! Peppino had never been separated from his mother, and no one on earth meant to him what she did. He had not realized till this moment that every action of every day was done by him to please his mother, and because she loved and praised him for it. He always felt her staunch support in everything he did, and he was not even afraid of old Mateo and his blows, because he knew he could tell his mother. But now he was to leave his mother for a long, long time. It seemed impossible to live without her. He was only a little boy, who every morning looked for her as soon as he opened his eyes, and in the evening always saw

her figure bending over his bed. That was to be all over now, and he would not see her for a long, long while. Yes, and by the time he came home she might have died. At that moment he saw before him the old woman Cinoca, who, raising her forefinger, had exclaimed, "The greater the joy, the deeper the sorrow." These reflections seized him violently, and the impending events seemed a true misfortune. Throwing himself on the ground, he cried bitterly, but that did not help him. An inner voice kept on repeating, "Now you must go to Father Benedetto; then you go home and as soon as it is morning you must leave." The agony of it made him cry aloud, "Oh, I can't bear it, and now it can't be helped. I'll have to go."

Suddenly soft, gentle music from the convent came floating over to him. It touched his soul as his mother's words always did when she would console him for not being able to have a life like other boys.

He jumped to his feet and ran over to the little church. Not a soul was inside, and

though Peppino could not see them, he heard the monks' peaceful, comforting chant. It seemed to help the lad, for, kneeling down, he prayed the Lord's Prayer so ardently that his heart grew lighter. The floating song seemed to say to him, "Go home and tell your mother everything."² Then the music ceased and everything was still.

Peppino left the little church and ran straight towards St. Paul's Church, for all he longed for was to go home and tell his trouble to his mother.

As he approached St. Paul's Church, a tall woman stepped out. Could it be his mother? But no, his mother never left the house before the *Ave*. Just the same it was his mother and could be no one else. Peppino's heart began to leap. What would she say when he told her? He ran towards her, and at the rapid steps Mrs. Bertolini turned about. She looked at him with eyes swollen and red from weeping, and a pain shot through Peppino's breast. He had not seen her shed any tears since they had carried away his father. Was he now to make

his mother still sadder? This thought troubled poor Peppino so that he stood glued to the spot, unable to take a step. His mother went up to him, and laying her arm affectionately round his neck, inquired, "Peppino, what is the matter?"

Flinging his arms round her, he exclaimed, sobbing, "Oh, mother, I can't do it. I can't leave you."

For a moment his mother stood absolutely still. Then she said with agitated voice, "Since when have you thought that way, Peppino? Or did you only think it just now when you saw me?"

Interrupted by sobs, the boy told how he had dreaded every day which had brought him nearer to the hour of their parting and related how the thought of going had completely unmanned him just now up on the height. He had thought that all was settled and there was no help whatever. He would die of grief away from her, he was quite sure. Then he told her of the comfort he had found in the little

church and—and—and— Here Peppino was unable to go on.

“And you don’t want to go?” added his mother.

Once more Peppino sobbed and wailed, “Oh, I can’t, I can’t!”

The mother pressed the boy closely to her side and said, “God be thanked, Peppino! Oh, I am so glad you can’t! Now I must tell you everything. You seemed so happy at first, I thought it would bring you pure joy. That is why I did not dare to deny you the opportunity, and besides you seemed to understand what you were doing. But all the time my heart was nearly breaking. When you were away to-day and I knew you would leave early to-morrow and not come back as usual, I felt I could not bear it any longer. I ran up here to church and prayed to God to help me. And as you see He has heard me. He never lets any one bear more trouble than they are able, I know that now. Oh, God be thanked!”

The lad had lifted his head and gazed at his mother as if he were in a dream. When she

was silently folding her hands, he asked timidly, "And aren't you at all sad, mother, that we'll have to keep on living in our hole and won't have anything but the majale table for a long, long while?"

"But, Peppino," said the mother, once more pressing the lad to her, "I'd rather stand at the majale table all my life and live where we are now than not have you. You are my only joy in life, Peppino."

As the mother had never spoken to the boy in that way before, he could not possibly have known her sentiments in that respect. It needed a very special occasion in fact to make Mrs. Bertolini demonstrative.

Never had Peppino been as happy as he was now. Clinging tighter and tighter to his mother's hand, he walked at her side, not quite realizing how everything had come about.

"Come, we must go up to the *Ave* now," said the mother. "I suppose it has started, but we still have plenty of time to join the prayers. I simply must thank God, Peppino, and you must do the same."

The boy was glad to do so and walked rapidly beside his mother, never once for an instant letting go her hand. Mrs. Bertolini knelt down quietly, while Peppino went to join the group of singing boys. Kneeling amongst them, he broke out suddenly into such a note of triumph that the *Ave Maria* resounded through the church like the last trumpet on Resurrection Day.

Old Father Vizenzo, who sat far up beside the organ, put on his glasses to look down and listened, gratified.

When the *Ave* was finished and Mrs. Bertolini left the church with Peppino holding her hand, the old monk joined them, and laying his hand upon Peppino's head, remarked, "I want to give my blessing to your little son, Mrs. Bertolini. He praises God with a loud voice."

When they had gone a few more steps, Mrs. Bertolini said, "We had better go and see your ladies right away, though it is rather late. We must tell them everything."

In his joy Peppino had forgotten about

them. As soon as he remembered Helmina's eager speech, a load settled on his joyous heart. He wondered what she would say.

When they had gone half the length of the long street, he asked in a low voice, "Oh, mother, don't you think the ladies will be very angry? Shouldn't we be frightened?"

"I can't tell," the mother answered; "we shall see."

After a few more steps he asked again, "Are you frightened, mother?"

"No, no," she calmed him. "All we have to do is to tell the truth. We have done no harm, remember."

CHAPTER XII

THE SITUATION CLEARS AND NEO GETS WASHED

WHILE mother and son were walking in the street below, Helmina was standing in the middle of her room. She had just received a long, much-anticipated letter which she had torn open at once and was reading eagerly. It was her father's answer to her enthusiastic description of Peppino's heroism and her planned reward.

"Listen to papa's reply," she said, turning to Clara, who was sitting at the table mending her friend's gloves as usual. And Helmina read:

"Your scheme respecting the Italian boy causes me severe doubts. What is a ten-year-old lad to do here, where no one knows his language and he can't speak ours? With whom do you want him to associate, the servants or our family? Besides that, when I hear our east wind blowing outside, as it is

doing this very minute, I am full of sympathy for your poor little son of the South, who, as you say, is very thin. Without ever having seen him, you must believe me if I say that it is far better to leave him to thrive in his own land. Keep your gallant rescuer in his own sunshine, please, and do not drag him up here to Meklenburg. You can give him a nice reward and a reminder of his heroism. He has deserved this for your sake, I am sure. But come home without such little lackeys of ten as companion, please!"

"Isn't it just too horrid of papa?" Helmina wailed. "How can he want me to be put to shame that way. Mrs. Bertolini is counting on my promise, and I am to step up to her and say that it has come to naught. She looks down upon me enough already in her grand fashion."

"She can't help that," Clara interposed, "for she is more than a foot taller than you."

"So everything is to be spoiled for my nice Peppino, who is looking forward so much to his journey? No, I won't do it!"—and by this

time Helmina's anger drove her to pacing to and fro.

"No, I won't, I won't do it!" she exclaimed repeatedly.

Just then some one knocked at her door and to their great surprise Mrs. Bertolini entered with Peppino. In a few clear words Mrs. Bertolini stated her case. Once more she expressed her gratitude, followed by her keen regret that the matter had taken such a turn at the last moment. Peppino hung his head till Helmina came up to him and, lifting it, said most kindly, "Don't worry about it, Peppino. Be merry. We'll stay the best of friends for all time, and I'll never, never forget the service you have done me."

Peppino's eyes actually sparkled with delight at her words, and the girl's heart melted with joy, so that she became completely reconciled to the unexpected failure of her cherished scheme.

It was not necessary to say a final good-bye yet, because the ladies had no intention of leav-

ing very early the next day, meaning to take a last stroll through the little town.

When Mrs. Bertolini and the boy had left, Helmina once more read her letter carefully, this time without getting angry. Laughing mischievously, she said, "Just wait, beloved father, I'll see to it that the nice little remembrance you mention shall be considerable." And with this she dashed downstairs and sought out Mr. Pagani in his reception-room. After a long conference with him she told Clara that their departure had to be postponed. In three days St. Francis' Day, a high church festival, was to be celebrated at the Capuchin convent. She wanted to see this, for on such an occasion all the women of the town gathered together in their most gorgeous costumes, and there was to be the most glorious music in the little convent church.

That same evening Mr. Pagani left his hall in an important manner and was seen going up the street with a beaming face full of happy import. He was the bearer of a message which

filled him with proud joy, for one of his prophecies was to be fulfilled.

The following day, when Peppino and his mother sat happily in their accustomed places, the errand-boy from the Hotel Roma appeared. After laying two sealed papers on the table between the bottles, he vanished. Amazed at the silent messenger, Peppino handed the papers to his mother. Opening one, she read, "Received payment for three years' rent at this very hour for the first-story apartment in my house in St. Paul's Street from the widow Bertolini," etc. Peppino stared at his mother and she handed him the other document. A long explanation and many involved words were written in this letter, but when Peppino had come to the end he understood that his mother again owned the old business. This went completely to the boy's head and he shrieked beside himself, "Oh, mother, mother! Now we can leave this hole. No more majale table! And back to the old house, hurrah! Oh, we are the happiest people in the whole world!" Then he raced around the table and

jumped clear across his chair, crying again and again, "From this very hour! at this very hour!" With a sudden impulse he crept under the table and, getting up, lifted the table on his head with all the bottles and cups right on it. He was ready to carry the whole thing at once to their new abode.

But here the mother had to curb her son's enthusiasm, for everything on the table had begun to shake.

Peppino was hard to tame, for he was completely beside himself. He ran up to their old house at once to see if they might really move in this very hour. And, sure enough, Mr. Pagani had seen to it that the few things still left there had been removed early that very morning. Most of the things had been pawned already by the good-for-nothing relative who had cheated Mrs. Bertolini out of her house and business. He had been glad on the whole to get rid of the affair, for a sum of ready money seemed very welcome to him.

That same evening Mrs. Bertolini and Peppino moved into the old house with all their

belongings, and the following day everything was as much in order there as in former times. It is true several objects were missing from those happy times, but at least the road was clear and things would soon settle back into the good old ways.

Once more Peppino and his mother were just setting out for the hotel in order to express the gratitude with which their hearts were filled, when Helmina arrived upon the scene herself, eager to see them in the old house.

“Yes, that woman really belongs here with her boy,” thought Helmina as she went through the hall and up the stone stairway. The moment she entered, Peppino came running up to her, but for all the things he wished to say he could not find a single word. Instead he just steadily kissed her hand.

This time Mrs. Bertolini manifested her gratitude in a way which completely won Helmina’s heart. The girl had never thought the woman could be so friendly and full of deep emotion.

St. Francis’ feast had come. Peppino,

thinking of nothing else since early morning, followed his mother about at every step she took. When finally a pause came in her work and she was sitting down, he clung to her closely and asked, "Mother, won't you go up to the feast with me? Oh, won't you put on the white cloth and the corals to-day?"

With a smile the mother gazed at his yearning eyes and answered, "You have brought all the happiness into the house, Peppino, and I'll go to the feast with you if you want me to." She bade him go and put on the new suit Helmina had ordered for him.

Once more Peppino stood on the threshold of the house, trembling with anticipation as he waited for his mother as of yore. Yes, and now she came out looking just as fine and gorgeous as he had remembered her and as he had only seen her lately in his dreams.

As the crowds wandered up St. Paul's Street and Mrs. Bertolini could be seen in her splendid attire, nearly a head above them all, Peppino, whose hand she was holding, simply beamed, and everybody was glad to see them

looking so happy. All good people rejoiced in looking at the splendid woman and her well-brought-up little son.

While Peppino was kneeling beside his mother in the midst of the festive worshippers, he listened to the beautiful music which floated through the church. "It must be that way in heaven," thought the boy, "and it can't be better there."

The service lasted several hours and Peppino and his mother came out almost the last, for they had waited for the blessing. There had been no need this time to hasten away, and both had been blissfully happy in church.

Helmina and Clara, who had also taken part in the service, were standing at the door. They wished to take leave of their good friends, and their carriage was actually waiting for them under the oak trees. All affectionately shook hands, and the hearty expressions of gratitude on both sides made the leave-taking a joyous occasion. All four hearts were happy at the others' joy, and the last words were, "We shall meet again, we shall meet again!"

About that time Mateo mysteriously disappeared from Albano, and nobody knew where he had gone. Mr. Pagani had kept his vow and Mateo had been fetched away one morning to the place where he belonged. Two men had taken him in a carriage and they had not brought him back.

At the time Neo had told his story to Mr. Pagani, the latter suddenly realized the solution of another mysterious story when two young travellers had been found miserably robbed, and tied to some trees on the road in the bushes. The police from Rome had come to Albano to investigate, but the criminals had never been discovered. Mr. Pagani found it wisest to put the dangerous man out of the way before he had brought all Albano and its environment into disrepute and he had given due notice at the right place of all Mateo's misdeeds.

Mr. Pagani took poor, neglected Neo into his house as errand-boy, for he was a just man who helped those in need.

And Neo really looked quite tolerable when he appeared for the first time in his life properly washed and combed by the bootblack of the Hotel Roma. However, only the future will show whether he will continue to work and stay clean and tidy, or will sink back into his former habits of uncleanness and sloth.

EVELI
THE LITTLE SINGER

EVELI

THE LITTLE SINGER

CHAPTER I

THE NETTLE FARM

JUST below the upper ridge, which was covered with a forest and bordered by it, stood a house which was too high up the mountain to be called a prosperous farm. The grass was not so rich here as in the fertile wheat and fruit valley below, but to make up for this it was very vigorous, and when the meadow was mown, the air was filled with delicious fragrance. There were other farms on the mountain-side, all surrounded by fields and meadows, but none were so high up as the house near the forest. It boasted one of the most beautiful meadows one could imagine, which stretched far down the slope, and a large field of dry earth behind the house yielded a plentiful crop of potatoes every year.

The owner of the farm was called the nettle-

farmer, but nobody knew just exactly why. Some thought that probably his ground was full of nettles, while others attributed the name to the farmer's unfriendliness, for his words, as a rule, stung like nettles. He himself was not averse to the name, for he only knew about the first explanation and was quite willing people should think that his ground was richer in nettles than potatoes and splendid hay. In the stable adjoining the back of the house stood two cows beside the indispensable goat. The farmer had often thought that there was ample room for three, and he reckoned that a good summer's harvest and the income from the milk would bring him in enough to buy a third cow. If his brother-in-law in the valley had three, why shouldn't he achieve as much? Besides this the nettle-farmer had another plan, one which needed careful consideration. To tell the truth, he spent a great deal of his time speculating on the future. His two boys of twelve and fourteen were already able to do considerable work, and the younger one was soon leaving school and would be able to work

entirely for him. If he had more cattle he needed more ground, and the piece of land bordering his sunny meadow would be just the right thing. It was worth more than his own land, he knew that well enough; just the same he could probably get it. The owner was anxious to sell it, for he had enough work as it was with no wife or children to help him. The nettle-farmer, who had no liking for hired laborers, thought how useful a third boy would be to him, and he saw no reason why he shouldn't have three boys. His brother-in-law had three, and two daughters besides. The nettle-farmer did not want a girl, though his wife did. She did all the work in the house most efficiently and quietly. Young women, on the contrary, would lose their valuable time in chattering and would make demands upon him and express wishes he had no intention to fulfil. So he thought the family was much better off without a daughter, whereas he would have plenty of work for another boy. He had gotten as far as that with his schemes when he reached home and his wife called to him,

"Come in and see our pretty new baby." Then she added, "It isn't a boy this time, but a little girl."

This annoyed the farmer exceedingly, for he saw all his plans upset. "Do with her whatever you like," was all he said before leaving the room.

When the Sunday drew near on which the baby was to be christened in the valley, the mother asked, "What shall we call the child? We have not talked it over yet."

"You can call her Eve," the farmer answered, "after the first woman who brought misfortune to a man."

The woman was not in the habit of answering such remarks, but this time she spoke up. "I don't think the little one has come to bring misfortune upon you. Just the same we can call her Eve. I don't mind the name; it is quite pretty."

Little Eve was baptized and they called her Eveli. As Eveli grew a little bigger she showed a very pliant nature, easily led and full of compassion for others. Whenever she saw

little animals on her path she would either walk around them or skip over them in order not to crush them. Did she happen to see one wounded or hurt, Eveli had no peace till she had made a soft bed for it on a tender leaf. Eveli had many little friends about the house, and it seemed as if the little creatures wanted to repay her for all the kindnesses she had shown. They flew and skipped about the little girl, and if she held out some seeds, the little birds would fly quite close and feed confidently from her hand. But whenever people came to the farm, Eveli sought refuge in the house, and she always looked about shyly when she heard strange footsteps. That was not to be wondered at, because Eveli never felt quite at home with human beings, for when she was running about as a little child, her father would often say angrily, "You always get under one's feet! Keep out of the way, you useless thing you!"

Later on her two brothers, Heini and Lieni, treated her in the same way and said these unkind things much oftener than her father. It was a great relief for the boys to give vent

thus to their bad moods, for the hard work they had to do often made them irritable. At other times they quarrelled violently with each other and that made them cross. Even before they were close to Eveli they would say to her, "Why don't you keep out of the way, you useless thing?"

This treatment made Eveli always feel in the way when she was with people, and she was terribly shy and afraid of them all except her mother. Her mother was never unfriendly, nor did she ever use a hard word. In fact, the woman used very few words at all, for she had to work hard all day, and when evening came was so tired that she fell asleep just as soon as she lay down beside Eveli. When Eveli was six years old and spring was near, the wife one day said to her husband, "What shall we do about the child? She must go to school after Easter."

"What do you mean? Of course she'll go to school! That's all," said the farmer.

"She is too little and frail to walk that long distance four times a day," the wife explained.

“She must stay in the village for lunch. We must ask somebody to give it to her.”

“Why send her to school at all,” growled the man.

“That would suit me the best, too, but they will compel us to send her,” was the mother’s calm reply.

“Send her to your brother’s house,” said the husband, and left the room. The wife knew quite well that her brother, who lived in the valley, was the only one of whom this favor could be asked. At the same time she wanted her husband to suggest it, otherwise he would never approve of it. The next Sunday afternoon she took Eveli’s hand and went with her to Untermires. Her mother, who was Eveli’s grandmother, was at home, and the old woman, who lived with her son, was simply delighted to see her daughter. The two met only a few times a year, for the younger woman got away from home very seldom and the elder one was not able to climb the mountain any more. She was also glad to meet her little granddaughter and rejoiced at the prospect of soon seeing Eveli

every day. All her son's children were grown up, and Hans, the youngest, was sixteen. Eveli was relieved beyond words to find all the five young people and their parents were away from home, for she had been trembling at the very thought of meeting and speaking to them all. But the grandmother, who was old and quite shaky, at once won Eveli's confidence. Perhaps the old woman was a little afraid of them herself. The grandmother tried hard to persuade her daughter to stay till her brother and sister-in-law came home and talk the matter over with them all. But Eveli's mother seemed in a great hurry to be gone, for her husband was not used to her being away and was probably waiting for her. She begged the grandmother to negotiate the matter, arranging that, if no report came to the contrary, she would send Eveli to them for lunch after Easter. The old woman promised to speak for Eveli, for she was looking forward to knowing the little girl better. The child was so quiet and retiring that so many strangers would probably frighten her, and she decided to do

everything to make her feel at home. Eveli was willing enough to come to her grandmother alone, but she secretly dreaded her uncle, aunt, and cousins, and hoped Easter would not come for a long while.

It came very quickly, however, and Eveli was obliged to go to school. When she sat down to her first meal with her numerous relatives, she was so timid that she did not dare to raise her eyes. She couldn't swallow her food either, for she was conscious of the many eyes looking at her and felt scared to death. If one of them asked her a question, she answered in such a low voice that no one could understand her. At last they rose from the table, and she did not know where to stand in her terror lest she should be told how much in the way she was. After a few days had gone by, one of her cousins began to tease her during lunch-time. "Haven't you learned to talk, Eveli," he asked, "or don't you need human speech up there?" And one of the others said, "Perhaps they are more like birds up there. They probably whistle instead of talk."

Everybody here laughed loudly, and one of them asked Eveli to whistle for them. If she could do so she would take the place of a canary-bird, something they had often longed for. Once more they exploded with such loud laughter that Eveli shrank together from embarrassment.

“Please don’t tease her any more with your jokes,” said the grandmother. “I know you mean no harm, but you have scared her dreadfully.”

Just the same, many jokes were made at Eveli’s expense, for the child remained silent day after day. Once her cousin Hans produced greater merriment than ever by comparing her to a folded jack-knife. When everybody went back to work after lunch in the kitchen, the field, or the garden, Eveli was left behind with the grandmother, and she would have a delightful time till she went back to school. She would stand in a corner behind the old woman’s spinning-wheel, and the grandmother would talk kindly to the little girl and tell her incidents

of her childhood. Sometimes she would say, "Come, let us sing together."

Eveli loved this above everything, for the grandmother knew lovely old songs which nobody sung any more, and they sounded well despite the fact that the old woman's voice was very shaky. Eveli liked to sing herself, for her soft voice, though small, was as clear as a bell, and she knew she was giving pleasure to her dear grandmother. Eveli was a different child during this hour, and would tell the grandmother many things. And yet the more her cousins tried to encourage her with jests, the more timid she became, so that she practically didn't say a word when they were present. The child always rose from the table as soon as possible and then would fly like a shy bird to the corner behind the spinning-wheel. As soon as they sat down together, the grandmother would say, "They don't mean to hurt you, Eveli. Don't take it too seriously, for young people like to joke and laugh. If only you would laugh with them!" But that was impossible for Eveli.

CHAPTER II

EVELI MAKES AN ACQUAINTANCE

IN THE evening when Eveli returned from school, a crowd of boys always went up the mountain just in front of her. They would run from side to side and make a lot of noise, and as a matter of course Eveli did not join them. They were boys from the scattered farms on the mountain-side and now and then one would disappear after having reached his home, or another had to take a different path. The crowd got smaller the higher they went, and Eveli was always the last one to reach her destination. About half way up, when there were still many of them, Eveli would keep back on purpose and skip along as close to the hedge as possible in order not to be noticed. At the end of the hedge, just before a number of them turned off, something rather peculiar always took place, something Eveli could not understand at all. The whole procession would stop

still, then loud singing would be followed by the queerest noise. After violent and prolonged roars of laughter the boys would separate. Eveli kept on wondering what was the cause of the odd scene, but she was much too frightened by the noisy youngsters to come very close. To-day she had been nearer to them than usual and they had lingered on the way. They had reached a little house which stood a short distance from the road beside a large birch-tree, where the curious incident always took place. Eveli could see that the boys were armed with hazel rods, and in order to see better she crept forward cautiously, then crouched down behind a crooked apple-tree at the roadside.

Now it began. With voices raised to a dreadful pitch the boys lustily sang the following words:

“There sits crooked Ben,
There sits crooked Ben,
Three times three is nine
And one to that is ten.”

Those in the rear beat time by striking the school-bags in front of them with their rods,

and as these cracked and broke to pieces, the air was filled with a sharp noise. Now the singers laughed inordinately, staying right on the same spot, but suddenly they dispersed.

Eveli now ventured forth from behind her tree and looked all around the little house, whose door stood open. She saw no one there, but when she looked towards the large birch-tree, she discovered a tiny person sitting on a stool close to the tree-trunk. Eveli was sure of her ground now and ventured a little nearer. A small deformed boy was looking at her with black wondering eyes. It was evident they had sung the song for him. Eveli happened to have a brilliant red carnation in her hand, for her grandmother had given her one from her pot in the window when she had looked longingly at her grandmother's pretty flowers.

Eveli suddenly dashed over to the birch-tree, laid the carnation on the boy's knee, and ran away again as if she had committed a shameful deed.

The following evening Eveli heard no noise or laughter and she wondered if the boys were

far ahead of her. Perhaps the boy whom they serenaded was not there.

While Eveli was pondering these questions, she came quite close to the house and heard somebody call, "Won't you come to me, please?"

Eveli shyly retreated a few steps, ready to dash away. But the call was repeated and sounded very pleading. "Please come over to me."

Eveli slowly approached the birch-tree, still a little afraid that some one else might be there. The pale, deformed boy sat on a little chair, and Eveli could see now that he was much older than he looked from a distance.

"Please come closer," he begged, when Eveli had paused shyly. She obeyed, and the boy looked her over with gray, searching eyes. The little face was so tiny and so full of suffering that Eveli felt deeply moved.

"Why did you bring me the flower?" he asked.

"Because they laughed and sang you that horrid song," she replied.

"Yes, and it isn't my fault at all," said the boy.

"What is not your fault?" inquired Eveli.

"I can't help my back being crooked. They shouldn't laugh at me." With this the small person looked up at Eveli to see if she also was going to make fun of him.

"Yes, I know how it feels," she said sympathetically.

"No, you couldn't. You haven't a crooked back," said the small boy after examining Eveli's back.

"No, but they laugh at me too for all sorts of things. You can believe me," said Eveli.

"Why?"

"Because I can't talk before so many people and I am always in the road," was Eveli's answer.

"All you have to do is to get out of their way," the boy suggested.

"I don't seem to. The others can do it, but I can't, however much I'd like to," was Eveli's explanation. "Perhaps they don't mean to hurt you," she quickly added, consoling him

and herself too. "You see, they like to laugh, that is all."

"Do you think so?" said the boy. "What is your name?"

"Eveli, and yours?"

"Beni; didn't you hear them sing it?"

"Yes, I did, but I didn't know if what they sang was true or if they invented it. Are you alone all the time?"

"Yes, for father only comes home to sleep and goes back to work in the morning."

"Where is your mother?"

"I have no mother, only a deaf aunt who keeps indoors all day. Will you come back to-morrow?"

"Yes, I will, if you are really lonely," said Eveli, anxious to leave.

"Can't you come here every evening?" begged Beni.

"Yes, I will if you want me to," said Eveli hurriedly, for a lot of time had gone by and she would be late getting home.

Eveli felt a great joy in her heart, something she had never known—some one in the world

wanted to have her company, and that person was a poor, sick boy of whom she needn't be afraid. As soon as she reached her home she ran to her mother to tell her something. But the mother was very busy, first with some washing and then with straining some milk, and next the little pigs had to be tended. At last she went into the kitchen to peel potatoes, and here Eveli was able to tell her adventure and ask if she could visit Beni every evening. The mother gladly gave this permission, for she liked Eveli to be happy and no one besides herself ever took any notice of the child; nobody cared or asked for Eveli. Next day the little girl could hardly wait for the moment when the noisy lads were done with shrieking, for she couldn't go to Beni till they had gone. Beni held out his slight hand to Eveli.

"I didn't mind their song to-day because I knew you were coming, and besides I was glad you think they only do it to make each other laugh. Are you going to stay with me a while?" he asked.

Eveli was glad she could do so and sat down

on the ground beside him. Beni wanted to hear all about school. What was it like to be able to read? Did Eveli think he could ever learn to read stories from a book and understand them as if they were told to him? His aunt had once told him that one learned reading in school and that he could also go like the other children if his legs got stronger.

"But I'll never be able to," Beni added sadly. "My legs don't get stronger, for they can't even hold me up."

Eveli understood now why the poor boy had two crutches beside him. Beni was not only deformed, he couldn't stand or walk either. Only by leaning on the crutches was he able to hop about a little. This seemed terrible to Eveli and with a heavy heart she sought in her mind to find some consolation.

"You'll probably grow stronger when you get bigger," she said, trying to believe this herself, "and there will still be time to go to school. You can't be very old yet."

"I am nine already," Beni answered gravely, nodding his head.

“That doesn’t matter,” Eveli eagerly continued. “Do you know what we can do till you are able to go to school? I’ll come every day and show you what we have learned in school, and all the letters we learned to read and write. I can’t read yet either, but sometimes the teacher tells us lovely stories. I can tell them to you and it will be just as if you went to school too.”

Beni’s eyes, usually so melancholy, lit up with joy.

“Do you think I can learn reading that way? And do you think I’ll be able to read stories to myself and understand them?” he asked, quite thrilled at such a prospect.

“Of course you can, just as if you went to school. And I’ll be awfully attentive so I won’t forget anything,” Eveli pledged herself. “In that way you can keep up with us. Shall we begin at once?” Beni actually trembled with a desire to learn, and no child ever made his first strokes on the slate with as much enthusiasm.

Something new had come into the little

cripple's life. When he woke in the morning he had something to look forward to, a thing unknown to him till now. All day he kept up his spirit by thinking of the evening, and he began even to long for the noisy lads, a sign that Eveli was coming too. As soon as the boys had separated, she came running to him from behind the apple-tree. Work was begun at once, and Beni showed such zeal that Eveli never could give him a long enough task. He would always inquire, "Didn't you learn anything else?" Thinking hard, Eveli was very apt to remember something she had forgotten. Beni's eyes would shine as if every new stroke he learned was a precious gift from heaven. "Perhaps we can soon begin to read, Eveli. Just think how wonderful that will be!" he said radiantly one day. "I imagine then we can read every single book which has been written. Do you think there are very many books? Are there enough, I wonder, to last us through our whole lives?"

"Certainly there are," Eveli assured him. "In school each class has its own reader, and

no two classes have the same. Then all the children who know how to read can go to the pastor every Sunday and he gives them each a book. Just think! Everybody gets his own book and each Sunday he can have a new one and it is never the same."

Beni marvelled that so many books could exist in the world, and after this his thirst to read what was written in those books grew even stronger. Also his ardor was fanned by the beautiful stories Eveli would repeat to him every few days. Though they were nearly all exciting and absorbing, they always seemed much too short to the hungry listener. Every time one came to an end Beni felt disappointed, and when Eveli assured him it was the end he thought that it might be longer in a book. Also in a book he could go on to the next, while Eveli could tell him only one at a time. Just the same, Beni looked forward to these stories with great eagerness. Another new delight for Beni was Eveli's singing; it thrilled him so that it always brought tears to his eyes. Beni had never heard any one sing

till now, for the daily insult of the mocking boys could hardly be called a song. Eveli had often told him about her meals with her relatives and how she always looked forward to the time when all left the room and she was alone with her grandmother. How kind the old woman always was and how they would often sing together!

Then Beni wanted to know what these songs were like, and when Eveli, in her soft, sweet voice, first sang him one, bright tears fell down his cheeks. Since then he knew no greater pleasure, and when Eveli had assured him that they had learned nothing more in school than what she had shown him, he would beg, "Please sing me a song, then, Eveli. I love it so." His glances were so earnest that Eveli never could refuse him, even if she felt it had really grown too late already with all the spelling. While Eveli sang, Beni was always completely unconscious of the fact that his eyes were full of tears, he was so enraptured. When Eveli asked him what song he wanted most, he always begged her for the spring song. Eveli granted

his request without a murmur, though she had sung it to him at least a hundred times. It gave her intense joy to make Beni happy, and she sang:

“All the little birds are singing,
May is near, May is near.
In my room the notes are ringing,
Join us here, join us here!

“No, in vain would be the trying,
Bird so free, bird so free.
Look, I have no wings for flying!
'Twill not be, 'twill not be.

“But in spite of all my sadness
Still they sing, still they sing,
Let your spirit share our gladness
On the wing, on the wing!

“Don't you feel the sunlight streaming
O'er you now, o'er you now?
Don't you see the blossoms gleaming
On the bough, on the bough?

“In the warm light softly hovers
What was dead, what was dead,
Every tender flower uncovers
Now its head, now its head.

“Trust, and for you too, poor mortal,
Spring will shine, spring will shine.
You shall pass the sky’s blue portal,
Soul divine, soul divine.”

Once in a while there was some time left before Eveli had to rush home to supper with her family. It was then that Beni would plead, “Oh, please sing me the one about getting well!” And Eveli would obediently sing the following:

“Bravely endure
Under your burden of sorrow.
Some one, be sure,
Cometh all sickness to cure.
Wait, it will soon be the morrow,

“Grief should be slight.
What if sun does forsake you?
Short is the night.
Let then your slumber be light;
Shimmering dawn will awake you.

“Pain cannot stay,
Cannot long trouble our nature.
Patience to-day!
Quickly the hours glide away;
Soon you shall be a new creature.”

CHAPTER III

NEW SORROW

AT THAT time the nettle-farmer's family had a hard life. The two boys, whom the farmer was wont to praise for their work, could not please him, and they got into a wretched humor. This they let out on poor Eveli, who tried hard enough to keep out of their way and yet had to hear constantly from both her father and her brothers that she always bothered them. Why didn't she make herself useful now that she was so big? they asked her.

One of the nettle-farmer's wishes had been fulfilled; he had been able to buy a third cow, and he managed his work so well with his two grown sons that he decided to take definite steps to acquire the piece of land he wanted badly. He knew that his neighbor would sell it as soon as a good buyer presented himself who was able to pay at once, and this the nettle-farmer could do. For seven years he had

planned for this enlargement of his property after the most careful calculations. He and his family had been obliged to pinch and save in order to accomplish this goal, but when he once owned the land they would be twice as well off as before. It was worth while to economize a little for such an advantage.

One Sunday he set out to talk the matter over with his neighbor. This neighbor had never married and lived all alone. He had to attend to everything himself, his stable, his fields, and household. All this work had grown too much for him with the years or he would never have even considered giving up that lovely piece of ground. This he had said himself, and till now no purchaser had suited him. When the nettle-farmer entered and made his offer the neighbor's eyes shot gleams of anger at him from under his shaggy brows. He could only marvel, he said, that the nettle-farmer had the impudence to ask him for any ground, and he absolutely refused to have anything to do with him. The reason for this the nettle-farmer knew well enough himself. The old man

said nothing further, simply pointing to the door. The nettle-farmer had to leave, firmly convinced that nothing further could be accomplished. He had simply been wrong in supposing his neighbor had forgotten what had happened twenty years ago. Between their two neighboring fields stood a pear-tree which both farmers had claimed as their property. Not being able to come to an agreement, they had gone to law, and the tree had been adjudged to belong to the nettle-farmer. Having won his case, the latter had thought the matter settled; he had forgotten it and supposed his neighbor had done the same. But his opponent, who had been beaten, never got over the loss of his pear-tree, and every time he looked at it his anger flamed up anew against the nettle-farmer.

After that interview it was hard to live with the nettle-farmer, who seemed to grow steadily more morose and ill-tempered. He thought of nothing else day and night but the beautiful piece of land for which he had saved, labored, and fought for seven years. He made scheme

after scheme to get it, and it appeared to him as the greatest treasure on earth. He felt that all his troubles would turn to joy if only he could become the owner of it. Being so near the goal without being able to succeed was just about unbearable, for all his efforts had been in vain. That piece of land was by far the most desirable and fertile stretch of ground on the whole mountain-side, for it was not only exposed to the midday sun but also to the west and therefore always got the last rays of the setting sun. Gloomily brooding over his frustrated wish, the nettle-farmer went about till he came to a new resolution. He would make his neighbor a proposition which would and could not be refused, for he must have the land if it meant slaving for it three more years. He wouldn't even care if he had not a single penny of ready money left after the transaction. That precious piece of ground must become his property.

One Sunday, when twilight was falling, the nettle-farmer set out for the second time to approach his neighbor. The farm in question

was quite a distance from his, much further down the mountain on the western slope. His neighbor was called the middle-farmer because his property was half way between the valley and the forest. The middle-farmer stood under his barn door when the nettle-farmer approached. "I am coming to see you once more about the sale of your meadow. This time I am pretty sure that we can come to an agreement," said the visitor as he neared the other.

"I have already told you my answer," said the other without budging.

"But I can pay you more than you are asking."

"That doesn't matter to me a bit."

"I'll pay you a quarter again as much and half of it in cash at once."

"I stick to what I said before."

"How much do you want for it, then? I am even willing to pay you more still if you tell me the price."

Here the middle-farmer lost his temper completely. "You shall never have my land even if I become a beggar. And now I won't say

another word if you stand here and beg me till New Year's. I don't care what you offer me. There, now you know it." With this the middle-farmer abruptly turned his back and went towards his house.

The nettle-farmer was beside himself with fury. He clenched his fists at the thought that all his well-laid plans and prospects were shattered and absolutely hopeless. More dead than alive, he reached his home.

Things went far from well at home, and Eveli hardly knew where to set her feet. Whatever she did seemed to make them all angry. Her only consolation was her daily evening visit to her little friend.

Meanwhile the height of summer had come, and one day the teacher announced in school that next week the six weeks' holidays would begin. This news made Eveli very happy, for she hoped to be allowed to go to Beni early in the afternoon and spend many happy hours with him. She hurried up the mountain-side as she had never done before and rushed to the birch-tree as soon as the road was clear. Beni

sat on his stool, crying miserably. He was so shaken with sobs that he could hardly wish Eveli good-evening.

“What is the matter, Beni? What has happened? Did somebody hurt you?” asked the little girl, frightened.

“Oh, everything is over,” he wailed, “and you will never be able to come again. We won’t see each other any more, for I have to go away. Yes, everything is over.”

Eveli was overpowered by terror and surprise.

“Where are you going? Why do you have to leave? Who said so?” she asked excitedly.

She was obliged to wait a little while before Beni could control his grief enough to tell her what had happened. Eveli’s arrival had made the matter appear doubly tragic to him. Beni often had bad attacks, in which he lost consciousness and fell from his chair. If his aunt, who could not hear him, happened to come out, she would pick him up and put him back on his chair. Sometimes if he was very ill she

put him to bed, where he always regained consciousness.

This morning, Beni related, he had dropped from his chair quite early in the morning, and when he recovered from his faint he was still lying on the ground. His aunt, however, did not come, though he called loudly, and he could not rise because his side ached dreadfully. Long after, when the aunt had come out, he could hardly sit up, and he showed her where his pain was. She said that a doctor must be consulted and went away at once. She came back with the report that he was to be moved down to the hospital to-morrow and there he would have to stay for quite a while, according to the doctor's orders. Eveli could see that Beni was still suffering.

These were sad prospects for Eveli, just when she was looking forward to her holidays. Perhaps she would not see Beni for a long while, perhaps not all summer long. She knew no comfort and sat down on the ground beside Beni. As she gazed at her little friend she was overcome with pity. To-morrow he would

have to go to the hospital among so many strangers. Perhaps he would never come back. These thoughts made her miserable and she began to cry softly, until Beni, who had never really quite stopped, began to sob again. It was impossible for them to do any lessons and still more impossible for Eveli to sing.

Next morning, on the way to school, Eveli looked over to the birch-tree. The little chair was gone, for Beni had been taken to the hospital quite early. Eveli felt a choking in her throat as if she had to cry out with pain and misery. But she must not come to school with tear-stained eyes; no, that would never do. So she ran down the mountain-side as quickly as she could and gained control of her grief.

That day her cousin Hans observed at table, "Eveli must surely become a nun, for her eyes sink deeper into the ground each day. Probably she won't open them at all any more, and she'll bore her way into the earth like a mole." An explosion of laughter followed this clever remark.

But the little girl was able to tell her sor-

row to the grandmother in the afternoon. She related how Beni had vanished, perhaps for all time. Perhaps she would never see him any more. The grandmother immediately replied that Eveli must not forget what she had once told her. If God gave human beings a particularly heavy burden, He always added a blessing too, one which couldn't always be seen right away because the burden hid it. But when the sorrow had been patiently endured, the blessing would surely be revealed, and it usually was a joy for which one had to be very thankful. Eveli must first of all think of Beni and not herself. It was a great blessing for the boy to be taken to the hospital, where he would get good care. Also he would be much less lonely there than he was at home, where his father had been away all day. His deaf aunt had been no comfort to him either, for he had not been able to talk to her nor call her when he was in need. Eveli promised to think of Beni and not herself. Just the same he too had been dreadfully sad about going.

When she came to the birch-tree that night

on her way home she hurried by as fast as she could, for the emptiness of the spot seemed unbearable to her. She was obliged to walk by it four more days, then came Sunday and the holidays began. She could not help thinking of all the beautiful afternoons she might have spent in Beni's company in the coming weeks, and this grieved her very deeply.

On Sunday morning Eveli was standing in the corner by the window, pressing some pink cornflowers in her mother's prayer- and hymn-book. She had a good reason for hiding herself as far out of sight as possible, for it would soon be time for them all to go to church, and her brothers always came in then to get their mother's help. They usually needed some buttons sewn on their shirts or they wanted their neck-cloths tied in order to look festive. They were always in a hurry, because they had to be ready before their father came in, since he disapproved of any finery on principle. Eveli's instinct told her to creep out of sight and not get into their way. Suddenly the door was noisily flung open and a firm step was heard.

Gazing out from under the table to the door, Eveli wondered who it could be. It wasn't one of her brothers, but her cousin Hans.

"Good-morning, aunt," he cried upon entering. "Where is Eveli? I suppose she has tucked her head under a wing and is hiding away from me in the straw. But it won't help her, she must come out!" When Eveli really came forth from her retreat, he had to laugh. She had really been hiding then, how funny! "Do you actually dare to come out?" he went on gayly. "Grandmother sends me to you, and she said that if she didn't have us two, no one in the world would ever do her a favor. Yes, we two are the good ones, aren't we? She got word from the hospital that you are wanted there. I suppose your mother will let you go, won't she?"

Eveli hardly dared to believe what she had heard. Was it really true that she could visit Beni in the hospital? She questioned her mother with a look, and the woman nodded, saying, "Yes, of course you can go."

“When?” inquired Eveli, still not daring to believe her good fortune.

“At two o’clock to-day, they said, and they’ll let you come quite often as far as I understood.”

“To see Beni? Can I go to Beni?” asked Eveli, still a trifle uncertain.

“Yes, you are to visit Benjamin Lorch, in the Untermires hospital,” said Hans gravely and with emphasis.

Eveli didn’t know what to say to Hans from sheer joy.

“Would you like a pear?” she said from a sudden inspiration.

“Yes, I’d love one,” laughed Hans, “but as they aren’t ripe yet, you can’t give me one.”

But early that morning the mother had discovered the first ripe fruit on their most treasured pear-tree. It had gotten the full sunlight on an upper branch and she had beaten it down and brought it to Eveli. The little girl drew it from her pocket and held it out to Hans.

“Hurrah, how splendid!” cried Hans, seizing it and biting into the luscious red and yel-

low fruit with his strong teeth. "That was the best pear I ever ate in all my life," he added in excellent humor, "so juicy and ripe, and it tasted especially good because I was hot. From now on I'll always take your part, Eveli, when you are with us again, and if they begin to laugh at you, I'll laugh at them instead. Believe me, I'll tell them such things that they'll be only too glad if I keep quiet. Just see how that will stop them! I promise always to be on your side now and you can count on me. Good-bye, I must go home now!"

With this Hans took his leave and Eveli gazed after him gratefully. It seemed too splendid to have gained such a strong protector, and she felt wonderfully happy.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE HOSPITAL

EVELI thought that the hour for lunch that day would never come. But at last it was twelve o'clock and after a short meal her father and brothers had left the room. Eveli immediately ran into the kitchen and hurriedly asked her mother, "Can I go now?" There was no hurry, for the child would not be admitted to the hospital yet, the woman thought. However, she let Eveli go, for she saw how restless the little girl was, and if she was too early, she could go to see the grandmother. Eveli dashed out, and in her joy the mountain-side had never seemed so beautiful to her. Pink morning-glories festooned the gleaming hawthorn-bushes, sweet-smelling thyme perfumed the hedges, and the sun bathed the green slopes. But the most beautiful sight of all was the blue cornflowers and the flaming red poppies which glowed between the wheat-stalks on

all sides. Eveli picked quantities of these for Beni, thinking how glad he would be to have them now that he was unable to see the flowers in the meadows and the hedges. Anxious to bring great heaps to her little friend, she picked as many as possible of the beautiful flowers, and every moment revealed to her more beautiful specimens. She saw some corn-flowers growing in bushes on the other side of the field and the poppies there glowed like flames through the tender wheat. Eveli felt that she must have these; they were the best she had discovered yet. By now her bunch had grown so big that she could hardly grasp it between both hands. She strolled down the hill quite slowly, for the flowers would have suffered from running. Besides, it was just as well if she didn't have to wait so long in front of the hospital. More time had passed than Eveli had realized, and when she got to the village and passed behind the churchyard across the meadow, the church clock struck two. Everything was peaceful and quiet about

the hospital, but as soon as she approached, one of the nurses opened the door.

“Is this Eveli? Have you come to see Beni?” the nurse said kindly. “Come in.”

Eveli went through a door into a room with a number of small beds in which lay sick children, though some were empty. Looking about, she saw Beni sitting in a clean, tidy bed, his laughing eyes turned towards her. Running up to him, she laid the huge bunch of flowers on his bed. Eveli had noticed an open door which led into another room, but she had not glanced in because she had been so eager to see Beni. But her blue and red flowers had flashed into the other room, and when she passed by, she heard a supplicating voice say, “Oh, please bring me one of them, just one will be enough.”

Understanding the request, Eveli looked at Beni. After all, they were a present to him. But taking two red and two blue flowers out of the bunch, he said, “Take these to them, for they suffer dreadfully in there. I often hear them groan.”

The nurse, who had remained near by, told Eveli she could bring the sufferers the flowers and offered to accompany the child. Seizing her enormous bunch, Eveli followed the nurse into the other room, which was very large. Many more beds stood here than in Beni's room, and in each lay a sick woman. When Eveli entered with her flowers, she heard exclamations from all sides: "Oh, how lovely, how beautiful! Please bring me one, child!" "And me, too!" Eveli wandered from bed to bed, always laying down a red and a blue flower on each coverlet, and the pale women looked up at her gratefully. They held the flowers in their hands, making the room look festive. But after giving flowers to the women Eveli still had quite a considerable bunch left, for she had picked great quantities. She began to wonder if she should begin distributing them anew. With this question in her eyes, she looked up at the nurse.

"Come, you can bring joy to many others yet," said the nurse, taking Eveli's hand and walking to the door.

The women unanimously called after Eveli, "Please come again, child!" This Eveli promised only too gladly, for she had never before felt such joy. Her heart expanded at the thought that these suffering women really wanted her to come again, and she was so glad she knew something which would bring them pleasure. The nurse went across the hall and opened another door, through which they entered another large room full of beds. Here lay young men with wasted faces and old men with gray hair and snow-white beards.

Eveli stopped shyly at the door, but one of them exclaimed, "Don't be afraid, child. Come here, please. Oh, may I have one of the lovely flowers?"

Other voices joined in, and the longing they showed was even greater than that shown by the women. One of the men cried, "Oh, what lovely cornflowers! If only I could see the wheat-fields now! Please give me one of the blue ones!" Many begged for them and showed real gratitude when Eveli again placed two flowers on each bed as she had done in the

women's room. In the furthest corner lay a man who frightened Eveli considerably by his unkempt look, for his hair and beard were dreadfully wild. He sat up in bed and looked with sharp glances at the flowers, so that Eveli thought he disliked her presence. She stood still and wondered what to do.

"Please come here, I won't hurt you," said the sick man, longingly stretching out his hands. "At least show them to me if you do not care to give me any. Thank you, thank you, good child. Where did you pick these? You say on the mountain. Oh dear, soon the beautiful wheat will be ripening, and I can't go out and see it. No, I can't go up to my fields, for I am chained here." Groaning with misery, the old man flung himself back on the mattress. When Eveli was going to leave, he begged, "Oh, please wait a moment, just a moment. Have you been up on the mountain? Did you see the wheat? How does it look? Is it getting yellow? Oh, if only I could see it!"

"Yes, I think it is getting quite yellow in some places," replied Eveli, "but I didn't look

at it very much because I was only looking at the flowers. But I'll look at it to-morrow, and I'll tell you about it."

"You are a good child. Now be sure to come again and tell me about the wheat," pleaded the sick man. "And don't forget to bring me a cornflower, too, please."

This Eveli gladly promised. When she walked back the length of the room, all the poor suffering people stretched out their hands and thanked her heartily, all begging her to return. Eveli was so happy and astonished at what had happened that she followed the nurse as if she were in a dream. She had never thought any man could be grateful for such a little thing as a flower, yet what intense gratitude she had experienced at those sick-beds! To be able to spread happiness was to Eveli a delight beyond words.

She had come back to Beni's room and he seemed much more happy and comfortable in his bed, supported by cushions, than he had been on his little stool at home. A smooth wooden board was fastened on both sides of the

bed and this made a little table. Here lay a new slate and slate pencil.

“Look, look!” said Beni, radiant with joy, “Sister Mary brought me this. She will let you come to me every day at two o’clock and you can teach me as you used to do. Yes, you can sing to me and tell me stories, just think of it! I told her all about you.”

Eveli was so overpowered by this new happiness that she could say nothing at first and only gazed at Beni over and over again. He looked so cosy in his clean white bed that Eveli felt as if she would like to sing and shout aloud for bliss. Beni wanted to begin lessons at once, for Eveli had been to school five days without showing him anything. But Sister Mary, who had kept close to them till now, declared that they were not to have lessons because the day was Sunday. The children had many days for that, and it was better if Eveli sang some of the songs Beni had spoken about. This pleased the children, too, and Eveli sang so joyously in her heart’s radiance that she resembled a jubilating lark which rises up to heaven and sings her

clear song over the ripening cornfield studded with red and blue flowers. Eveli had never sung as well as that and Beni could not get enough. As soon as one song was finished he begged for another, imploring her not to stop. And Eveli kept right on till she knew no more songs.

The Sister had opened the doors wide to the other rooms, but Eveli had not noticed this. The pale woman nearest the door exclaimed now, "We have had the most beautiful Sunday, child, and you must come to us again and make us happy on other days." And others joined in, saying, "Oh, please sing to us once in here, too. It would give us such pleasure."

The Sister came to the children and said that it was time for Eveli to leave the hospital, and they were not a bit sad for Eveli knew she could return to-morrow at the same time, and every day after that, and that all the sick people wanted her to come, and this gave her infinite pleasure.

The child could not climb the mountain fast enough, she was so eager to tell her mother all

her marvellous experiences in the hospital. The mother always had some leisure time on Sunday, when she would wander about the house or stand still a while in her cabbage patch in front of her carnations. All her motions were leisurely in comparison with the hurry she manifested during the week. When Eveli got back, she was standing in her garden and she had time to listen to Eveli's thrilling tale. Eveli was full of enthusiasm as she described Beni's lovely bed and the firm pillows which supported his frail back. When she related about the many sick people, their suffering faces and their great joy at the sight of her flowers, such a flood of exquisite love and sympathy poured from Eveli's eyes that the mother looked at the child in amazement. She had never seen her so animated. "You must go and see grandmother to-morrow and tell her about it too. I know how pleased she'll be," said the mother.

Eveli realized that the sick people had been so delighted with her flowers because the flowers had brought back to their minds the

beautiful meadows and the sunny fields they all loved. She picked just as large a bunch of cornflowers the following day, adding a large mass of fragrant thyme. This she packed into her apron, and last of all she took a tall stalk of wheat. Eveli knew that the wheat was to be harvested, but just the same she saw no harm in taking just one stalk to a sick person. Also the fragrant thyme would help the sick people to picture the sunny slopes and blooming hedges.

Heavily laden, Eveli arrived in the hospital. The Sister, who intended to take her to Beni at once, was most surprised when the little girl asked first of all to go to the men's ward. Here she walked the whole length of the room to the last bed, and stopping near a shaggy man with a heavy beard, she said, "Here is a stalk from the large field on the middle slope. You can see how nice and yellow the wheat is. It looks quite golden in the sunshine."

The man seized the stalk with a trembling hand and carefully examined the grain, which was firm and perfect and nearly ripe. "Oh,

how beautiful one is, and then to think of a whole wheat-field of such stalks! Oh, I wish I could see it," groaned the sick man. "Did you really pick it from the large wheat-field on the middle slope, somewhere near the large oak-tree? Or was it on the other side where the lightning has split the pear-tree?"

"This is from the field where the large oak-tree stands," said Eveli.

"Oh, then it's one of my own wheat-stalks. And here I have to lie and can't see them! Oh, my fine wheat-field, why can't I see you?"

The unkempt man's eyes filled with tears, and Eveli's heart was so touched that her eyes grew moist.

"Perhaps you'll soon be well," she tried to console him. "Then you can go and see it."

"I know you mean well," said the sick man, wiping his eyes. "Come and sit for a while on the chair beside my bed. Your flowers smell wonderful to-day. They make me feel as if I were on the mountain-side. Have you thyme in your apron, child?"

Eveli affirmed this and when she opened her

apron the perfume spread through the room. Exclamations of delight came from all sides, and everybody seemed to feel refreshed and strengthened.

A young man, as young as her cousin Hans, lay in the next bed, but he looked very thin. Also he was as pale as though he had never been out in the sunshine. He sat straight up in bed and drew in the fragrance in long breaths. "That's the way it smells in our garden at home," he said. "Oh, how long it is since I saw it! I see it all before me—the little wall overgrown with thyme and the murmuring brook under the alder-trees."

The sick man turned away and pressed his face into his pillow. Eveli quickly got up and laid a bunch of thyme on his bed. Then she wanted to go. "Not yet," cried the old man. "Don't go yet! Please sit down again, for I want to tell you something."

Eveli obeyed.

"They told me that you sang some beautiful songs in the other room yesterday. Sing us one, please; we like to hear songs here too."

“Yes, we’d like to hear them,” others joined in, and Eveli at once sang one called “Recovery,” thinking that the old man might like it. She had guessed quite right, for he listened absolutely spellbound till the end. Eveli rose now. “Please sing us a song again to-morrow; we want one every day now,” he declared. “And you must bring me another stalk, too, but only in a few days, and not too many at a time. To whom do you belong? Where do you live? Is your home somewhere near my field?”

“We live on the nettle farm near the woods,” replied Eveli.

The sick man winced as if he had received a blow.

“That can’t be true!” he cried infuriated. “You couldn’t belong to the nettle-farmer. You probably just live there, but he couldn’t be your father.”

“But he is!” said Eveli, frightened.

The sick man was silent for a while, measuring Eveli with his gaze. “You don’t look like him a bit,” he said a little more calmly

at last. "I suppose you look like your mother. But don't be afraid of me. I won't hurt you. Only be sure to come again. Will you promise?"

Eveli did so gladly, and after placing a few flowers on every bed, she went to Beni's room.

As it had grown rather late by then, Beni had been looking all the time to see if Eveli was not coming, but when she told him what had kept her, he immediately understood. He was willing to wait every day till she had been to the other patients, for he knew what it was to suffer and was glad if the older sick people had a little pleasure, too. He seemed very happy, though, that Eveli had come at last, and found many things to tell her. The most important was that Sister Mary often showed him how to form new strokes and letters, also she had promised him an A B C book. He might possibly get ahead of Eveli now in reading, for he had so much time. When he told his little teacher this he looked at her expectantly.

Eveli showed how glad she was for Beni, and the boy now openly manifested his joy, for

he had been secretly afraid that Eveli might feel discouraged. But no such thought crossed her mind, for she would have been only too happy if Beni could read as well as the children in the sixth grade.

After leaving the hospital Eveli ran over to her uncle's house, for she had not forgotten her mother's suggestion to go to the grandmother. Also the child was intensely eager to tell the old woman something. If only she would find her alone!

When she arrived, she saw the old woman sitting alone at her spinning-wheel. Eveli called from the doorway, "Grandmother, everything has happened as you said. It really came."

"What came? What do you mean?" the grandmother asked in surprise.

"The blessing you told me about. You know the blessing which was hidden under the grief God sent us," Eveli went on eagerly. "Do you remember telling me that it was always hidden under the pain and that we don't see

it right away. But it comes out at last, and oh, it came out so quickly for us!"

Here Eveli began to tell her grandmother about all the recent blessings both she and Beni had experienced, and how they had come from the circumstances which had made them so sad at first that they never expected to be happy again. When the grandmother heard this she couldn't spin from sheer delight, and after listening eagerly she said over and over again, "Did you remember to thank God for everything too, child? Don't forget to thank Him, Eveli."

When the old woman had fully rejoiced with Eveli over everything she said, "You must never forget this experience, Eveli, and when another sorrow comes, or probably more than one, always think that God is sure to add a blessing for you which can't be seen at first by our blind eyes. If you think of this, everything will turn out just the way it did this time. Remember, though, that the blessing isn't evident at once and often it comes upon you quite unawares. Sometimes you can't

even realize it when it has come. Always remember this beautiful experience, Eveli. Then you will never lack consolation when you have to bear a heavy burden, for at such times you will know for sure that God means only your good in whatever He sends you."

Eveli at once declared that she would never, never forget the lesson she had learned.

The grandmother, however, showed the child that it wasn't so very easy always to remember about the blessing. Many people before her had intended to do so, but when sorrow came they thought only of their grief and completely forgot that God meant well with them always.

CHAPTER V

THE NETTLE-FARMER IS SURPRISED

DURING the fine holidays which followed, Eveli appeared daily at the hospital with a new bunch of flowers, and the sick people longed so much for her coming that the happiness she brought them was quite evident. Of all the others the old man in the corner manifested the most keen impatience when the time drew near for Eveli to arrive. He would ask the Sister repeatedly, "Hasn't the child come yet?" As soon as Eveli entered she had to sit down beside his bed, and he always kept her for a good while. No one else ever came to see him or bothered about him, he would say, begging her to stay. The child was only too glad to do anything for him, for he often said that her presence made him forget his pains. Eveli was not only obliged to sing him several songs every day, but the old man also begged her for some tales she had heard either in school or from

the grandmother. The old man had discovered how delightfully Eveli could tell stories, and he never seemed to get enough.

When the last holiday week was nearly ended, he asked Eveli anxiously what was to become of him as soon as school began. But the child at once promised to come to the hospital on her two free afternoons, including Sunday. On the other days she hoped to pay them all just a short visit, for otherwise she would have to go home in the dark. The sick man at once made her promise to come to his bedside, however short her visit would be, and begged her for a long stay on her free afternoon. Knowing no greater happiness than to be able to bring happiness and comfort, Eveli pledged herself to do this. On the last day he begged for every single song she knew, for he loved them all. After this Eveli had to describe to him the fields, the trees, and meadows on the mountain-side, especially the fields on the middle slope. When she was obliged to go at last, the sick man drew forth a little paper from

under his pillow with considerable effort. "Don't lose this and give it to your father," he said.

Eveli put it in her pocket and ran to Beni. When the two said good-bye, they were far from sad. They saw no separation before them, because the kind Sister Mary had given Eveli permission to come to the hospital whenever she had time. This would give the child three full afternoons a week and an hour here and there on the other days. Neither would Beni be left alone any more as formerly, for the nurse was very good to him. He hardly dared to tell Eveli how many letters he knew which she had not learned yet, and he hid his knowledge like the most precious treasure. But he hoped that Eveli could also acquire more learning now that school was starting again.

Eveli hurried home, a little frightened at giving her father the slip of paper, for she had practically had no intercourse with him till now. As soon as she got home she sought her mother and delivered the old man's message to her, begging the mother to hand him the little

note. The mother unfolded it and read the few words.

“No, Eveli,” she said, folding it again. “You must give this to father yourself. He’ll soon be here.”

The woman went out to the kitchen and left Eveli alone. When the father entered, Eveli held the little scrap of paper out to him and said very timidly, “Father, the sick man told me to give you this.”

“What sick man? How stupidly you talk,” growled the father.

“I don’t know,” replied Eveli, still holding out the crumpled note.

But the father took the note, which consisted of a few tolerably legible sentences. He read:

“For the Nettle-Farmer. You may have the land now, and if you wish you can have it to-day. You owe it to your child, not to me. She has been very good to me, and I only wonder that you have such a child.

“You can have the land for the price I

quoted first, for I don't wish to make a profit. This is also for the child's sake.

“Rall, the Middle-Farmer.”

The father looked at his child over the top of the letter as if he had never seen her before, or observed her properly. He was completely taken aback and began to read the letter through once more. At that moment the brothers came in to supper. They had been fighting and both were furious. Heini, who had thrown open the door first, stumbled in noisily. As Eveli was standing at an unaccustomed place near the door in front of her father, the boy nearly fell over the little girl. “Can't you ever get out of one's way, you useless thing you,” he cried indignantly.

That moment the father struck the table with his fist and everything on it shook. Even the older boy trembled.

“If I hear one of you say another word like that I'll show you who is master here. I'll see to it you won't forget it, either,” he thundered. “Now will you remember this?”

The boys looked at each other in consterna-

tion. Why had their father's anger suddenly turned against them?

The farmer only realized his good fortune fully next day, which was Sunday, and as he had plenty of leisure, he talked over the middle-farmer's offer with his wife and sons. But he did not show them the letter. He resolved to take the matter in hand at once, for a man who acted so mysteriously was apt to change his mind overnight. The father also resolved to give Eveli a handsome reward, for it was plain to him that his neighbor's resolution had been brought about by her in some curious way. When he considered the profit he would make by getting the land so much more reasonably than he had expected, he decided to make Eveli's gift a generous one. But it was a great problem what to give her. He puzzled over it till Monday night, when he summoned the child to him. Eveli was still quite afraid of her father and wondered what he wished to say to her. She had been with her mother in the kitchen, where she was telling her about the first day of school, also about her visit to the

uncle's house, which had been happy to-day because her cousin Hans had kept his promise. Whenever one of his brothers or sisters had made a mocking remark about Eveli he had flung himself upon the offender and turned the joke against them, making her or him the butt of the others' jests. Now she could go to her uncle's house without being afraid, for Hans would be a strong protector.

"I want to tell you something," said the father to Eveli. "You have done a good deed, child, and I wonder how you did it. I'll give you a reward, and I'd like you to tell me what you want. You shall have anything you say."

Eveli remained silent.

"Don't be afraid to say what you want," the father urged the child. "I don't know what some such things might be, but you probably saw something that appealed to you when you visited your cousins. Well, what would please you? Don't you know?"

Eveli had not a word to say.

"Well, is there something, or can't you

decide?" the father questioned. "Don't you want anything?"

"Yes, father, there is something I would like," answered Eveli shyly.

"Then say it out, for I promised to give you whatever you want. But you must tell me," the father insisted once more.

"I'd like to live with Sister Mary in the hospital for good and make the sick people happy," was the shy answer.

If Eveli had suddenly talked in the Latin language, her father could not have looked at her in greater surprise. He had known nothing about her visits to the hospital, neither had he any idea what her interests and inclinations were.

"I don't know what you mean, child," he replied, slowly. "Only the pastor knows about the hospital. I don't know anything about it. Ask me for something I can do now."

"Please, father, ask the pastor if I can't go there for good," said Eveli again.

Here the father began to doubt the fact that Eveli was really his child, just as the mid-

dle-farmer had done. Was it possible a child of his did not grasp an advantage when she was offered one? But her obstinate persistence appealed to him and he muttered to himself, "She would have been my best boy."

"A promise is a promise," he said aloud, letting his little daughter go.

On Sunday morning he asked his wife for his church clothes and told her that he was going to church. As her husband only went there on the highest feast-days, the woman was quite surprised. But the nettle-farmer did not want to call on the pastor without first having been to church. When he came home he told his wife that he had been to see the pastor after church and had found out the most amazing things. The pastor and his wife knew Eveli well, as both had often seen her in the hospital and been surprised at all the good the child was able to do for the sufferers there. When the farmer had stated Eveli's wish, the clergyman had said that he would talk to her when she came to have instruction from him in religion later on, and when she was confirmed

he would show that he had not forgotten her wish.

Till then the little girl was to be allowed to go to the hospital, because she brought everybody joy and comfort. The pastor had talked about Eveli as if she were something quite unusual and very precious, and this had surprised her father above everything else. He would see to it that she was properly treated at home from now on and would not allow her to be teased any more by her brothers.

“We gave her a bad name to start with, I am afraid, and we shouldn’t have done it,” he admitted, quite conscience-stricken.

“Never mind, Eveli’s name isn’t bad. No, it is a good name,” said his wife, “and I’ll take good care of the child, believe me. I am so glad our pastor is taking an interest in her and values her.”

Eveli told her mother soon after that the clergyman had promised to have her wish fulfilled as soon as she was old enough.

When autumn came, Eveli could only spend an hour in the hospital after school, for she was

not allowed to walk home too late at night. This hardly gave her any time for Beni and the lessons they had begun together. The middle-farmer had obtained a promise from her that she would come to him first every day, and she kept her promise faithfully. It was hard for her to leave the old man for her young friend. When she told the grandmother how dreadfully emaciated the old man looked and how he loved her stories, the old woman would always think up new tales. These were mostly about people she had known who had suffered great pain on earth for wrongs they had committed, but who, after repenting, had finally begun to long for God's grace and had died peacefully and gone to another world. Eveli repeated these stories to the sick man, and he was so eager for them that she constantly needed a new supply.

Once Eveli came to Beni rather later than usual and said she hoped he would not be angry for her late coming. But Beni looked at her with sparkling eyes and cried, "Come, Eveli. I have something wonderful to tell you

to-day, and I am sure you can't guess what it is. I hope it won't make you sad."

"What makes you so happy couldn't make me sad," was Eveli's reply.

"Just think, Eveli, I can really and truly read now. Just imagine! I am able to read and understand a whole story," Beni went on, pulling a little book from under his pillow and showing Eveli a story he had read through alone. "Perhaps you'll be able to read soon, too," he added, "but you can't know yet how wonderful it is to be able to read a book alone, and not just one, but every book."

At this news Eveli burst into loud demonstrations of joy, showing Beni at once that she needed no consolation for not yet being as far as he. Beni had a good substitute for her visits now, and Eveli rejoiced that his new occupation would help him to pass the time and keep him from being lonely. But Beni had not yet related everything. Sister Mary had just told him that he wouldn't have to go home that winter, and this had made Beni very happy, for

he had dreaded the loneliness of the long winter days at home in the dark, cold chamber.

“Just think, Eveli,” he exclaimed, delightedly, “I can stay here all winter, where it is so cheerful and warm. I can sit in my lovely bed instead of shivering all the time in the dark and getting hurt when I fall off my chair. Oh, I am so glad! I can read stories all the time, and as soon as I have finished a book, Sister Mary has promised to fetch me another. I am sure few people are as well off as I am, don’t you think so too, Eveli?”

Eveli also rejoiced over these pieces of good news and expressed her delight over and over again. Beni was to be cared for by the good Sister Mary in the place she loved above every other and here she could see him a little while every day. Both children thought that they were experiencing the greatest happiness anybody on earth could have.

During the first snowfall that winter the middle-farmer closed his eyes, and his last words were a blessing. Eveli had spent quite a while at his bedside that day, and he had

begged her to sing him a song which began, "Bravely endure." When she was done, he had seized her hand and held it tighter and tighter, as if the little hand were an anchor for him in the dark billows which surrounded him. When she left him at last, he had called a blessing after her.

The doctor's hints to Sister Mary about Beni's condition made it very easy for her to have Beni permanently installed at the hospital. This meant the fulfilment of his sole wish and made him the happiest of mortals. He sits all day in his comfortable bed with a book on his little bed-table, and he constantly smiles while he reads to himself or talks to the kind Sister Mary. He loses himself in his book till Eveli arrives and both have many interesting things to tell each other.

Every day of the coming summer Eveli again appears at the hospital with her large bunch of flowers, bringing joy and refreshment to every sufferer. The pastor has not forgotten Eveli's wish; you may be sure he is only waiting for the right time when he can fulfil his promise.

THE STAUFFER MILL

THE STAUFFER MILL

CHAPTER I

A RESOLUTION

QUITE a distance above Gesteig, a tiny mountain hamlet, stands a lonely hut. Right beside it a path leads up to the high mountains and a gay stream rushes headlong to the valley. One bright summer evening old Lucas sat on the narrow wooden bench beside the door. He watched the full moon rising from behind the mountain and gradually spreading its light over the peaks and valleys. Lucas had been a well-known mountain guide in those parts, but was now old and had gradually been obliged to give up his work to the younger men. Here and there, he still could take parties on short trips when he did not have to carry burdens, but this hardly happened any more. He had become too feeble for his work.

“Come here, Jörli,” he now called to a boy

who seemed busy with some task beside the stream, "I have to talk to you."

"I'll be there in a minute, grandfather," the boy called back, sliding about on his knees in order to speed his work. In a little while he came running to the bench. Despite the cool evening breeze his cheeks were glowing and his large eyes shone like blue flames in the moonlight.

"Oh grandfather, the wheel won't work. If only I could see how they work it in a mill," said Jörli, pushing his light hair from his hot face.

"Sit down beside me, that will cool you off. I must tell you something," said the grandfather, and Jörli sat down. "Do you see how beautiful the moon is to-night? Eight years ago, just after your father died, it looked down on us exactly that way from the same spot. I remember so well when I brought you here on my back, and I like to think of the day when you came to live with me. I have to tell you something which will hurt you, child, and hurts me, too; something I hate to have to tell you.

We had better sing a hymn of praise before I do it."

"Can I go and fetch the mandolin, grandfather?" asked Jörli. "Singing always sounds so much better if I play it."

"Yes, you can, but come right back," the grandfather replied.

The boy obeyed, and in a few moments he was again sitting on the bench. Mandolins were not known in these parts, and his instrument must have been brought from another country. The boy fingered the strings casually but quite cleverly, too. The grandfather began a song with his deep, still vigorous voice and Jörli joined in with bell-like tones, striking the strings correctly at the same time. Both sang:

"My heart leaps high for pleasure,
It knows no grief nor pain,
But sings a merry measure
Like bird-notes after rain."

"Why do we sing such a happy song, grandfather?" Jörli interrupted, "and why do you do it when you have something sad to tell me?"

"I do it for that very reason," replied the

grandfather. "A song of praise brings back confidence and joy into our hearts. It is good to praise and thank God in every situation, and I could tell you something which would show you the truth of what I say. I have more reason to know than anybody else. Let us sing some more."

This they did, but as soon as the song was finished Jörli said quickly, "Grandfather, won't you tell me what you know about songs of gratitude and praise? Why are they suitable just when we are sad? I love to hear stories."

"I meant to talk to you about something else," responded the old man, "but if you want to hear something that happened to me, I'll tell you that first."

Apparently the old man was glad to be able to put off the unpleasant moment. "It must have been about nine years ago," he began, "a year before I brought you home, that I came home from a trip to the high mountain over the Rhone Glacier. I was walking along rather carelessly, for I had often crossed it before, but

some fresh snow had fallen, and I should have been particularly careful. Suddenly I fell into a crevasse in the glacier, one much too deep for me ever to get out of alone. What was I to do? I called out several times, hoping to be heard, but my voice did not carry any distance. I called out louder and louder, but all in vain. Suddenly I thought of singing a song; that would carry further and would seem more connected, too. If anybody happened to come by and saw no one, he would be sure to look where the singing came from. I at once began to sing my favorite song as loudly as I could:

‘Let all give thanks to God
With heart and hand and voices!
What wonders He hath wrought!
In Him His world rejoices.
He from our childhood still
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And ceaseth not to-day.’

“With these words faith in God came back to my heart. I was able to repeat it with much more strength and assurance than before. The first time my voice had sounded pinched, while

now it had a ring of courage. Suddenly I heard voices above me and soon they came nearer and nearer. Next a rope was let down, and a voice called out to me to fasten this under my arm-pits. I replied that I understood what to do and begged them to pull me up. A few vigorous pulls and I was saved. The men were both guides I knew, and one of them asked me, 'Did you lose your mind from fright, Lucas? How could you sing a hymn of gratitude and praise when you were so near your last hour?'

"'No,' I replied, 'I had full command of my senses, but I'll sing you another right away, and I'll always do so for the rest of my life in all situations. That song made me trust in God and gave me the strength to sing loudly enough for you to hear me. That alone has saved me.' I at once began to sing it over, and both men joined in. You can imagine how joyously I could praise the Lord now, for to stand once more on the firm ground under His deep-blue sky made me blissfully happy. Thinking of my wonderful escape just now, Jörli, has

once more given me confidence in our good Father in heaven, and I'll tell you at once what you have to know. You see, when I brought you home I was still able to climb the mountains and earn some money. Also old Lene, who owns the little house, looked out for you and kept you from falling into the stream beside which you were always playing. We never could get you away from there."

"I know. I was always trying to make mill-wheels even then," Jörli interrupted. "Just the same I can't make them right yet."

"I know, but listen to me now," the old man continued. "After a few years I could only take smaller trips, because the long excursions were too tiring for me, and since last year I can't even undertake those any more. The little bit I had saved up is all gone now, for we had to live while I earned practically nothing. Meanwhile old Lene has grown very infirm and she told me to-day that she couldn't manage by herself any longer. She is planning to ask her young cousin in Gesteig to come with his wife and live with her. That means we

have to go, for there won't be any room for us any more in the house. If I were still vigorous and young, that wouldn't worry me at all, but I can't expect to get any more work here. Who should give it to me? And besides, I don't even know if I could do it properly. I had hoped I could help Lene with her bit of land and her two goats, and she would let us stay till you were able to earn your living. I know I shall not last much longer."

"Oh, I can earn money for you now, grandfather. Just see, I am nearly as tall as you," said Jörli, stretching himself as much as possible. "I can work for both of us, I am sure. I'll go to look for work to-morrow morning, and old Lene simply has to keep you here till I have earned something and can pay her. I'll bring it up to you, and I promise to work till I can do it. Just wait and see, grandfather."

The boy's happy assurance relieved the grandfather's fears. "That is right," he said, "just be confident and don't lose your faith in God, for He will help you when the time comes. Don't forget to pray, either, Jörli. You aren't

so little any more, it is true. You must be nearly twelve, for you were about four years old when I brought you home. Set out then to look about, and I am sure Lene will keep me a little longer. If you find no work, you can come back here, and we'll go and look about together. If people see me crawling around as slowly as I am obliged to do nowadays, they might give me work out of sheer pity."

"Will you let me take the mandolin?" asked Jörli anxiously.

"You can take it if you want to, for it belongs to you," replied the grandfather. "But remember that it will be a burden for you to carry and you might be sorry you dragged it along."

"Oh no, never. I am sure I sha'n't," said Jörli with assurance. "I simply couldn't stand being so far away from you if I didn't at least have my mandolin, grandfather."

"Take it then, take it," the old man answered, realizing that this reminder of home might prove a comfort for the lad. "It certainly is a curious instrument," he added,

examining the old mandolin while Jörli was softly playing a melancholy tune. "I don't see how you can make these sounds," said the grandfather. "You seem to be born to do it, for I never could have shown you how. But even when you were a tiny boy of six and I sang to you, you were able to pick out the right notes on the instrument, and you sang and played both. Yes, it was wonderful, and you have gotten better every year since then."

"I just love my mandolin, grandfather. I love it best in the world after you," Jörli declared.

Meanwhile the moon had traced her white path across the sky and the hour when they usually retired to rest was past.

The grandfather got up. "Come, Jörli, it is late, we must go to bed. You needn't set out to-morrow. We'll wait till the day after. How empty it will seem up here without you, child!"

"Then you'll have to sing your songs, grandfather, and that will make you happy again," Jörli consoled him, following the old man into the hut.

CHAPTER II

JÖRLI LOOKS FOR WORK

IT WAS a bright summer morning when Jörli stood before the hut ready for his journey. An old leather bag which the grandfather had used on ever so many mountain climbs hung on his back. It held his second suit, a shirt, and some stockings. Jörli wore a pair of good shoes, which the grandfather had bought him lately for the trip. At the boy's side hung the mandolin.

"Go, and stay a good boy, Jörli. You owe it to your grandfather," said old Lene, who also came out to say good-bye.

"Farewell, Jörli," said the old man, holding the boy's hand for a while. "Keep God in mind, and when things go badly with you, sing a beautiful song. That will bring back confidence into your heart. Be sure to keep your firm faith in God, then everything will go well."

After once more giving the grandfather his

hand, Jörli set out. He didn't want the old man to see the tears which were beginning to choke him.

Jörli didn't take long to go down the mountain over the smooth pasture-land. The sun was shining and the birds whistled in the branches. Jörli's heart grew lighter. As the boy had set out immediately after sunrise, it was still quite early when he came to the wide road which led from Gesteig to Interlaken. After walking another stretch he saw the large imposing hotels of Interlaken. Crowds of well-dressed people strolled about in the tree-bordered avenues, while others sat on benches under the shady walnut-trees. These sights made Jörli happy and confident. He thought that he would easily find some work in a place where there were so many people. Probably there would be more work than he could do. He entered the very first inn, and seeing a waiter carrying a large tray heaped with plates, he at once inquired, "Can I find some work here, do you think? I could help you carry these at once."

“Off with you and get out of my sight at once! We need no vagabonds here,” cried the waiter, threatening the boy with his sharp glances as well as his rude words. Jörli ran out, much frightened. After going a few steps he came to a long building with high windows, which also proved to be a hotel. An enormously fat man with his hands in his pockets stood in the wide doorway. As the frightened boy was approaching, the heavy man looked at him calmly. This must be the innkeeper himself and he won’t be so cross to me as the waiter was, thought Jörli. Coming up to the door, Jörli felt encouraged by the man’s imperturbable calm.

“Can you give me some work, please? I’ll do everything as it should be done,” the boy began, while the man examined him from head to foot and once more from his feet up to his head. But the innkeeper shook his head.

“We have no work here for half-grown boys and idle music-makers,” he said at last. Jörli still waited a little, for the man had talked very slowly and Jörli hoped he might

add something. But nothing more came. Then the man slowly pulled one hand from his pocket and with his thick thumb pointed up the street. This meant, "Go along now." Jörli left. Round the next house was a garden. Jörli had hardly entered it, when a woman called to him from a window, "No, no, don't make any music!"

"I haven't come to make music. I want to ask for work," explained Jörli.

"There is no work here for you. Shut the garden door!" With this the woman shut the window.

Jörli's courage began to fail him a bit. If he could find no work here, where there was so much life, where else could he expect to find it? However, there were many, many houses left where he had not asked yet, big ones and small ones, and he would keep on. The very next house might be the right one, who knew? But he was mistaken. He was sent away from there, too, as before. The boy wandered down the long street, asking for work in every single house and was refused in every place. After

going through the town he came to the open country.

He resolved to try a farm, for there must be plenty to do here in the middle of summer. An old house with a large roof standing in the middle of a meadow beckoned to him with its homelike air. Through the open door he saw the farmer's wife cooking at the broad kitchen range. An inviting odor of baking greeted him.

"Can you give me some work?" Jörli asked without going into the kitchen. The woman was busily running about with a pot in each hand.

"If you come in the fall you can pick up apples and pears for us," she said with a quick glance at the questioner. "There isn't anything to do now for the likes of you," she added, at once going on with her work. Before going Jörli once more drew in the fragrant odor, for he had had nothing to eat since his cup of milk and potatoes at five that morning. It was noon now and he had been on his feet ever since. He looked back once more, but the woman had no time to think of anything

but the midday meal she was preparing for her workmen. She did not notice the boy's longing look, and he was obliged to go on. He did not want to beg, because his grandfather had brought him up to think it a shameful thing for people to do when they were able to work. Knowing himself fit for work, he started off again. He saw several smaller houses at a distance from the road, but where there was so little land there could not be much work, thought Jörli. At last he came again to a large farm, where two huge oxen were just being harnessed to an immense hay-wagon. "This means that they are going to fetch in the hay," said Jörli to himself. "There must be some work here," he added, vigorously striding up to the house. He at once recognized the master by the orders he was giving to his men.

"May I go along and work for you?" asked Jorli, confidently approaching the master. "I can do haying well, for I always helped grandfather at it."

"I know the kind you are," replied the farmer, casting a scornful look at the mando-

lin and going right on talking to his men, hereby clearly showing that he wished to have no more dealings with the lad. Very much cast down, Jörli kept walking down the road, and though he inquired for work everywhere, he did so ever more timidly. He always received the same answer, and on the largest farms from which he had the biggest hopes he was sent away with the shortest words. The sun was nearly setting and he was still journeying on. Weariness and hunger began to pain the boy considerably. He would soon be too tired to walk further, and then he would have to sit down by the roadside and die. This sudden vision gave Jörli such a shock that he could not go on for a while. He sat down by the highway and began to think of his grandfather up on the bench beside the hut. He was sure the old man was wondering how he had succeeded in his quest. Jörli suddenly thought that the moment had come for him to sing a song of praise and gratitude just as his grandfather had explained to him. When he was going to begin, he found it much more difficult

than the old man had found it in his glacier crack. Jörli could not even start, for the notes stuck in his throat. He now took up the mandolin, hoping that would help him. He could not help thinking of all the contemptuous glances which had been cast at his dear old instrument, and he said comfortingly, "I don't care how much they despise you; I love you just the same, and I won't ever leave you behind me, no, not even if they chase me away for your sake." He began to touch the strings, but they had never sounded so sad as this before. When he attempted to begin a song in order to make it sound more cheerful, all his painful experiences of the day suddenly overpowered him, and he sobbed aloud at the recollection of his life with his grandfather. He simply could not sing, and the mandolin only accompanied his loud weeping. This was not at all the way the grandfather had done when he fell into the crack, and yet Jörli had the beautiful blue sky overhead and was standing on solid ground. The boy did not wish to be ungrateful. With a new effort he began to sing one of the songs

of praise his grandfather had taught him. He actually sang every verse of it and soon his mandolin began to give forth brighter sounds. The last verse even came out quite vigorously:

“I thank Thee for Thy boundless grace,
My prayer Thou still dost heed.
None strive in vain who seek Thy face;
Thou helpest all in need.”

When Jörli had sung these words, cheerfulness again reigned in his heart, for he knew once more whence help could come to him in his utter loneliness. He laid aside his mandolin, and folding his hands, looked up at the sky and prayed: “Oh dear God, let me call to Thee, for I know Thou wilt not forsake me when I am so alone.”

These fervent words gave him new courage. He got up, hung the mandolin around his shoulder, and confidently pursued the road once more. From time to time he looked up to the pale evening sky and sang loudly and joyously:

“None strive in vain who seek Thy face;
Thou helpest all in need.”

CHAPTER III

A DOOR IS OPENED

NOT far from the spot where Jörli had been sitting miserably on the ground a rushing stream poured downhill to the near-by lake of Thun. Shaded by old luxurious walnut-trees stood a mill with solid walls and high gabled roofs. The great wheel was turning round and round and large sacks of wheat were carried in. Then the fine white flour was packed into fresh bags, stacked high, loaded in wagons, and driven out of the courtyard by four powerful white horses. Whoever came near this large mill imagined that there must be plenty of life and activity in the house as well as the mill-works. But people were wrong in that. The owner of the Stauffer mill always went silently from one building to the other and never said a word except an occasional reproof to his workmen —“Well, why isn’t this finished yet?” or else he would startle a miller lad in passing by a quick, “Go and do it better.” The miller un-

derstood his business well enough, but he did not seem to rejoice in his fine property and splendid mill. A hidden sorrow seemed to be sapping his vitality and spirits. Neither was his wife the merry woman she had been years ago when the young people of all the neighborhood loved to gather at the mill, where they could be so happy, for the mistress always had some new pleasure or surprise ready for them all. The only son of the house, for whom she loved to give these festivities, was acknowledged by everybody to be the smartest, merriest lad, and no other would have fitted so well into the beautiful mill as he did. "You should have seen how we used to live here sixteen years ago, and all the feasts and jollities we used to have," the old serving-maid often said to the young woman who had lately been engaged to help her. The two women had just cleaned the yard with their brooms and were going into the house when the elder made this remark again. That moment the miller came walking across the yard with gloomy eyes and his head bowed low. "We had quite a differ-

ent life then," continued the maid as soon as he had disappeared in the stable. "The young son was still here then, and he was so handsome and kind, besides, that everybody had to like him. You have no idea how proud his parents were of him. Oh, yes, they were entirely different in those days. You should have seen how the miller's wife could laugh with her boy and how proud the miller looked when he saw his son jump to the loaded wagon and sit on top so smart and full of life. It actually was a pleasure to see him drive away with the four white horses."

"Did he die?" asked the young girl.

"He went away to foreign parts in order to learn more about his trade and he never came back," the older woman answered. "Of course he is dead, for they never even speak his name. Both the miller and his wife felt it so deeply that they were unable to mention it to anybody."

"I often wonder why the mistress always goes to the attic every evening after sunset," the young girl began again. "She stands there

at the open window and looks—well, as if she were seeing something quite special. Once when I stood below, I saw her open the shutter and lean away out, but I couldn't see what she was looking for."

Just then the two maids heard their mistress climbing up the stairs. "Do you hear her?" said the young one.

"It isn't our business what she is looking for. Go now and fetch in the water. Everything must be ready when she comes down again," retorted the older woman, quickly going into the kitchen.

From her window the miller's wife could overlook a large extent of road, as it looped out like a white ribbon between the dark forests. In order to see both sides of the road she leaned away out over the edge. She gazed first in the direction of the forest, then towards the lake. She was on the point of stepping back and closing the shutter, when she looked out once more and gazed attentively at the road. "No, it is nothing; he is much too little. He isn't coming yet," she whispered hurriedly to herself,

wiping a tear from her cheek and shutting the shutter. The figure the woman had seen was Jörli's small figure walking along the highway. He suddenly stood still and listened.

"Oh, here is a mill!" he exclaimed joyfully. "If only I can see the wheel before it gets too dark!"

With this he turned from the road and ran towards the stream, where he could watch the fine large wheel whipping the waves with its enormous paddles. Jörli stood gazing at it in complete absorption, for ever since he had been old enough to think he had always longed to see a mill-wheel working. The grandfather had shown him how to make small wooden wheels for streams and had explained that mills with their giant wheels worked on the same principle. Jörli was amazed. If only he could have a little peep inside the building and see how the wheat was ground and the machinery fitted together which ground the coarse grain into fine white flour! This wish grew so powerful that he forgot everything else. It happened that the miller had seen the boy run-

ning to the side of the stream. He took him for a beggar, and when Jörli vanished behind the mill he followed him to see what the small vagabond wanted. But Jörli was so deeply lost in contemplation that he did not notice that some one had approached. The miller was much struck by the boy's quite evident admiration. "What are you thinking about?" he suddenly asked.

Jörli was dreadfully startled, but finally gathered courage to reply, "If only I could see how the wheel grinds the wheat into flour!"

"Where is it you belong?" asked the miller in a not unfriendly fashion, walking in the direction of the courtyard. Jörli followed, suddenly conscious again of why he was travelling alone. When they had reached the yard, the miller stood still and looked the boy over.

"I am looking for work, sir," said Jörli. "Do you think you could give me some work in the mill?"

That moment the miller caught sight of the mandolin and his tone completely altered. "So

you are one of those!" he cried. "Off with you and don't let me find you here again."

Jörli was so taken aback by these angry words that he remained immovable.

"Did you understand me or not? Must I chase you off then?" cried the man wrathfully. "Come, Sultan, chase him away."

A large dog, who had already been growling, jumped up and flew at the lad with terrible barks. Jörli turned and ran out of the yard with a cry. The miller's wife, who had heard her husband's angry words and the boy's outcry, came running out of the house.

"How can you be so cruel to a child, Stauffer?" she said with spirit. "What harm has the boy done you?"

"He is one of those confounded musicians," cried the miller as he ran excitedly to the stable. His wife at once went out on the road, and after looking about saw Jörli walking not far from her. His gait was very slow, for his recent fright, added to his weariness, had nearly prostrated the poor boy. When the

woman kindly called him back, Jorli stopped irresolutely.

“Come back!” she cried, “you needn’t be afraid. I’ll take you into the house with me.” As he slowly turned, she asked with sympathy, “Are you tired? Where do you come from?”

“From the mountain on the other side of Gesteig,” he answered. “I left home this morning at five o’clock.”

“But you couldn’t have walked all the way?” said the woman.

“Yes, I did. I only sat down once beside the road,” said Jörli, thinking of how he had wept and sung.

“I suppose you ate your lunch then?” inquired the miller’s wife.

“No, I didn’t have anything to eat,” replied the lad.

“What, you haven’t eaten since this morning? I don’t see how you can still stand up,” exclaimed the woman. “Come child, follow me into the house.”

As they crossed the yard, angry Sultan came tearing toward them. But his mistress

cried out with a commanding gesture, "Stop, Sultan, be quiet!" and the dog at once crept into his kennel without a sound. They came into a large, homelike room, where a long table was spread for the miller lads, with seats at the head of the board for the master and mistress. Leading Jörli to a small table, the woman said kindly, "The others are not coming yet, but you must have something to eat at once."

The serving-maid now brought in what the mistress had ordered. Jörli got a heaped plateful of milk porridge, and while he was enjoying it, the kind mistress spread butter on a piece of bread and laid a slice of ham on it. She now lit a lamp, for it had grown quite dark. "I must see what you look like," she said slowly, and began to carefully examine him. There must have been something she liked about him, for she looked at him steadily without saying a word. Her glances were so friendly that Jörli began to feel happier and he ate his supper in comfort.

"You look as tidy as if your mother had

dressed you this morning," began the mistress, "and you don't seem like a strolling musician who climbs mountains and plays for strangers in order to sleep on the straw only to leave next morning."

"I am not one of those," said Jörli. "My grandfather's name is Fretz and he is a guide. I have always lived with him. He told me to put on my good things this morning and to pack the other ones in my bag. He said I wouldn't get work otherwise."

"Where are you supposed to work?" the miller's wife wanted to know.

Only then she discovered that Jörli had no idea where to go nor where to spend the night. To the woman's question why he had to leave his grandfather so young, the boy related that his grandfather was too old to climb mountains and had no more money for them to live on. Besides this, there would be no more room in the cottage for them, because old Lene was taking some relatives into the house.

"Why are you carrying this instrument

about with you?" the miller's wife inquired further.

"Because I am so fond of it," he explained, "and because I can sing better when I play it. Grandfather taught me a lot of songs."

"I see. What kind of songs did your grandfather teach you?" she inquired.

Having finished his meal, Jörli was full of good spirits and of gratitude. He therefore began at once to sing a happy song of praise. His mandolin also sounded livelier than it had done for a long while.

"Your grandfather taught you a very fine thing," said the woman, herself rejoicing in the comforting words of the song. "I like your voice. You must sing for me again. But come, give me your mandolin now, for I must put it away." The woman quickly seized the instrument and put it high up in a cupboard, for she had heard the miller's step outside.

"Won't I ever get it back?" asked Jörli with a sad glance towards the cupboard.

"Oh yes, but not right away. I do it for

your own good, remember that," she quickly added.

Jörli was so convinced of this that he felt comforted at once. The miller now entered and looked with flashing eyes first at the boy, then at his wife.

"You are mistaken, Stauffer," she said calmly, "the boy is no strolling musician at all. His grandfather is a guide from the mountains over there. The boy is looking for work and he has no place to spend the night. He shall stay here to-night, for we never send honest people away from here, I know that, and this lad and his grandfather are that kind."

The miller said not a word, but he watched her take the boy's hand and lead him out. She took him to a large room upstairs with a splendid bed. "Sleep well," she said sweetly. "What is your name?—Sleep well, Jörli, and to-morrow we shall see where you are to go." She gave the boy her hand and looked so affectionately into his eyes that he felt completely at home.

By the time the miller's wife came down

again, supper was ready, and when the men and lads had left the room after the meal, she sat down with her husband at a small table. She handed him his pipe and tobacco, and poured out a little glass just as she did every night. When both were comfortably settled, she said, "Now we'll talk about the boy. Did you notice what a nice, good face he has. And something else, too; he has a way of looking at one—like—oh, I can't say who."

"Why does he carry that instrument?" asked the miller sharply.

"But Stauffer, haven't you been a boy, too, once? Don't you know how boys are?" replied the woman. "Don't they all haul something around with them?—one an old pistol, another a razor, and a third a few lead bullets which tear his pockets. Each one has some treasure he won't give up, even if it is no more than a piece of cobbler's glue with which he mends everything. Don't you remember how you were?"

The miller had to nod, for the description fitted his own recollections.

“Well, that’s the way with that boy,” the wife continued. “He has somehow gotten hold of the old mandolin, and when he had to go from home, he wouldn’t leave it behind; that is all. It is hard and cruel enough for a boy as young as that to have to go out and earn his bread among strangers. I know he has been buffeted about. And now I want to tell you, Stauffer, that I want to keep the boy here. There is plenty of odd work with us in the house and yard, and if he does as well as I expect him to, you’ll soon want to have him in the mill.”

“Indeed! So you mean to immediately employ a young vagabond about whom you know absolutely nothing. That will have a nice ending!” replied the miller. But his tone had softened somewhat and he was not so angry as soon as he knew the boy was no strolling player. He also remembered the boy’s careful contemplation of the mill-wheel and felt more tolerant about the matter. His wife was quick in detecting his altered tone and knew she had won her case without a further battle. This

made her so happy that some of her former good spirits came back and she entertained her husband with many an incident of the past and present times. When the old clock suddenly struck ten, the husband looked up surprised.

“It’s been years since I thought it was nine when the clock struck ten,” he said. Before going to sleep the wife thought to herself that she would make Jörli sing to her every evening from now on. It had been a long, long time in truth since she had listened to anybody singing or had sung a song herself.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE MILL

JÖRLI rose early next morning, as was his custom on the mountain. He stood in the yard ready to go away, only waiting to thank the mistress and get back his mandolin. The miller now came out, too, and he could not help liking the boy for being up so early. He returned the boy's greeting in a quite pleasant manner, adding, "Go in, my wife is getting breakfast for you." The woman was busy in the room setting the table when she heard the boy's step. "Come in here," she said kindly. "Look, you are going to sit beside me at table, for you are going to stay here. We can give you work and I am sure you'll do it well."

Jörli could hardly take in this blissful prospect. Could it be true that he would live in the mill and be able to watch its intricate workings? The greatest happiness of all, though, was to be staying with the good, kind woman. He could not say a word, but his eyes shone from pure delight. "Are you glad, Jörli?"

asked the mistress, smiling. "I am glad, for I am pleased, too."

At breakfast, when all her people were gathered, she told them that Jörli belonged to the household now and was to be considered one of them. After the meal she took Jörli to the yard, where big Sultan was sunning himself in front of his kennel. The dog jumped up angrily and growled.

"Come here, Sultan," said the mistress, pointing to Jörli beside her. "Look at him well, Sultan! He belongs to me now and you must lick his hand." With this she very slowly and tenderly stroked the boy's hand. After attentively watching her for a while Sultan came up tamely and did as he was bidden.

"Nice, big Sultan," said Jörli, laying his hand on the dog's head; "we'll be good friends now, won't we?" Wagging his tail, the dog once more licked Jörli's hand.

"He understands, you see, and you may be sure he is going to be a faithful friend now," said the miller's wife, while she petted the dog for reward. Then she walked on, for she wanted to show Jörli all the various sheds and

places in the yard. Next she led him to the cellar, and last all through the house. As she wanted to train him for her personal servant and companion, she wished him to know where everything was kept in the house. Jörli had his eyes wide open and took notice of everything the woman showed him. After inspecting the living-rooms and explaining everything there, she took him to the attic. Here she quickly opened the shutter and looked up and down the highway, not saying a word, however. Jörli, thinking he was meant to do the same, came close to the woman and also looked out. "Oh, the shutter is going to fall!" he cried suddenly, taking hold of it with all the strength he had. The woman, seeing the great danger, took hold of it, too.

"Oh, run as fast as you can, Jörli, and bring one of the men up, but fetch a strong one. The shutter is terribly heavy and might easily kill somebody." Jörli flew down the stairs. "That comes from having my thoughts elsewhere," said the miller's wife to herself. "I have opened it every day and didn't notice how loose it was."

Quicker than she had thought possible, help arrived. This was lucky, for strong as the woman was, she could not have held the enormous oaken shutter very long in her present awkward position. Jörli had, with good judgment, picked out the right man at once, namely, the carpenter, who was working below in the mill-works. In that way the matter was at once repaired. The miller's wife was so filled with the event and the lucky prevention of a possible disaster that she at once sought out her husband. She told him what a support their house had gained in Jörli and she had so much to say about the boy's sharp wits, his cleverness and ability to think things out for himself, that the miller answered dryly, "Look out, or you'll have to take back most of these praises in a week. This is only his first day here, remember that."

But this made no impression on the wife. She would never have to give up the good opinion she had already formed of Jörli, and nobody could ever tear from her heart the love she felt towards him. In her joy she told her two maid-servants how lucky it was Jörli

should have come to them, adding that the boy was accurate and clever in both his work and judgment, chiefly because he had his whole mind on what he was doing instead of letting it wander to a thousand other things. The servants did not like to hear such praise. There had been nothing wrong with the house before the young straggler had come, and it was obvious that the mistress meant the last remark for them. This made them furious, and they resolved to make Jörli pay for this.

Things went better with Jörli every day, for he soon knew all the ropes of the household and where everything was kept. His mistress was able to rely on him as she did on herself, so that he soon became her right hand. Her love for him made her constantly talk to her husband about the boy. The miller would listen silently. "Eight days are not up yet, remember," he would say.

When a little more than a week had passed, early one morning the miller met Jörli in the yard. The boy was coming from the chickens and ducks in the back yard, for they had been given to Jörli to take care of.

"Twenty little chickens crept out of their eggs last night," he cried triumphantly.

"It seems to me you are pleased with your new family," said the miller. "Don't you ever long to see what goes on in my mill? Would you like to come with me and see it?"

Jörli's face beamed with joy. He had long wished to do so, but the big miller lads had not shown him any friendliness and he still felt quite shy of his master. He had therefore not ventured nearer the mill than the open door, through which he had peeped.

"Come, then," said the miller, understanding the boy's silent reply.

After hesitating a moment Jörli asked shyly, "May I first go and tell mistress about the little chickens? Or can't I go if I don't go now?"

"Run along and tell her! Apparently the family comes first," said the miller, while a smile flitted over his features, something Jörli had never been before. The boy speedily dashed away to bring his mistress the happy news and soon bounded back to the mill. Meanwhile, all the men had arrived and the whole

mill-works were humming with activity. The miller took Jörli all over the building and gave detailed answers to the boy's eager inquiries. Not a leather strap or funnel escaped the lad's keen attention, and he tried to find out the object of every wheel and engine. A particularly intricate machine was in charge of an unusually tall lad, called "Long Kaspar" for his great height. Jörli gazed at this in silent wonder. Then, kneeling down, he watched it sort the different grades of flour. The miller left the boy to his contemplation for a moment, and when he returned, Jörli, still lost in admiration, said, "If this strap were fastened tighter back there, it would turn round much faster; the whole thing seems to stop entirely every once in a while."

The miller stepped closer to examine the matter.

"What are your eyes for if you don't use them?" the miller said angrily to Long Kaspar. "Aren't you ashamed to think this boy, who is looking at this for the first time, can see what is wrong at once, and you let it go on like this? You've worked with it for years,

and yet you don't know when it needs attention." The miller set the matter straight himself and went on with Jörli. Long Kaspar sent a furious glance after the boy.

When the inside of the building had been inspected, the master took the boy outside and showed him the workings of the wheels. For this Jörli showed an especially keen enthusiasm. Hadn't he spent whole days at his stream-side, thinking out wheels and works as intricate as these?

"Now you have seen everything, I'll give you some work. I want to see how you do it," said the miller.

They went in again and Jörli was soon absorbed in his new task.

Eight days had gone by and the mistress knew well enough why she had lost Jörli. Whenever she called him she was told he was busy in the mill with the master. She missed the boy dreadfully and could not help wishing to have him back. Just the same, knowing where he was, she could not help rejoicing at the thought that her husband would now have a chance to find what Jörli amounted to and

what a treasure he was. This had gone on for a week and her husband had never said a word about the lad. However anxious she was to know how Jörli was making out in his new work, she restrained herself. She knew her husband would not give her a definite answer till eight days were up. Before that time her husband would give no verdict.

At last Saturday came and she had settled down at the little table beside the miller. "Well, what do you think of Jörli?" she asked eagerly. "You seemed to have him about you a lot last week."

"There's never been one like him, I can tell you that," the miller answered instantly, for he had been waiting to be questioned. "I have never met his like. He has eyes like a falcon, which see at a glance what is wrong, and not only that but he also knows how to put things straight. I've never known such a thing to happen in a young fellow who has absolutely no experience of the trade. He seems to have been born a miller. And to think that he should be nothing to me at all! No, he is a poor fellow without a home. Oh, oh!" sighed the miller

deeply. "I have only known one other, yes, one with eyes like an eagle, too, and hands capable for any work. Whatever that one undertook succeeded and he could do just about anything he took up. But to think what he did want! Oh, it is too dreadful!" groaned the miller in his misery.

The woman here felt urged to interrupt her husband. He had grown more and more agitated and she realized that he had not talked so much at a stretch for years. "Stauffer," she said, "we must let bygones be bygones and be glad that the poor little boy happened to come to us. We both need him and he is useful to us. Let us both share him! You keep him one day in the mill and I'll have him with me in the house the next day. That will make us both happy and he can learn everything."

"What do you mean?" retorted the husband. He had not shown such animation for a long while. "There is nothing more for the boy to learn here, for he did everything better in eight days than your two maids, who have been here eight years. I've had a good look myself at the duck and chicken yard. Not since

we've had the yard has everything there looked so spick and span. The boy knows better than any one here that one must get up early with the sun. He always gets to the mill before anybody—that is the way to really learn. I'll make him into the best miller lad I ever had, and perhaps even let him learn mechanics. I have lately thought a lot about enlarging the business. No, you must give him up. I need him every day. He must learn the trade thoroughly."

The woman gave up fighting for the lad at once, for she was only too glad he had won over her husband so completely. Her husband had not been so eager and animated since he had lost their only son. She hoped, however, to find ways and means to get Jörli back, for she had no intention of giving him up entirely. She would content herself for the present with their evenings together, when Jörli sang her his songs on the bench before the house. This had become her happiest hour. She only let Jörli sing when the miller had gone indoors, for she knew he could not endure the music yet.

CHAPTER V

CLOUDS

JÖRLI was quite conscious of the fact that the miller grew more kind to him every day and ever gave him more important work to do. Several times when some machine in charge of much older men had gotten out of order, the miller had called for Jörli and asked him how to set it straight. The confidence and kindness the master showed him pleased Jörli so much that he felt spurred on to work better all the time. He was so anxious to please the miller that he soon knew more about every detail of the works than many lads who had been there for years. Neither did the master conceal the fact that he found Jörli more reliable than the grown-up fellows. This made the latter furious and one and all were filled with a bitter grudge against the newcomer. No one spoke a word with Jörli, and he only got scornful glances from them the minute he entered the mill. This hurt the boy dreadfully and he would have to wipe away a secret tear when-

ever he received a look of contempt or an insult after speaking a friendly word to them. They mostly turned their backs on him and did not answer at all. Long Kaspar, however, was his greatest enemy and the workman's anger grew more evident every time they met. When Jörli passed him he would cry mockingly, "You vagabond, you tramp!" These were words which were particularly bitter to Jörli because they were true. After all, he had no home and had only just happened on the mill by accident. Who knew if he wouldn't be homeless once more and obliged to wander round again when he left the mill? Was he then really a tramp and a vagabond? Though he couldn't help it, the words had such a shameful sound they made him wince with pain every time he heard them. The young girl in the kitchen had also begun to talk to him in the same way. Every time she came near him, she sneered, "You tramp and vagabond," just like Long Kaspar. The maids were clearly on the side of the young men, and the young one had an especial grudge against him, for she had never forgotten her mistress's reproof after

Jörli had come to the house. The elder woman never said anything, but threw him furious glances whenever he appeared. She simply couldn't bear the lad for the position he had made for himself with the family.

Jörli had just gayly come into the kitchen with a basketful of fine fresh eggs which he wanted to show his mistress. He was dreadfully disappointed when she wasn't there, for the maid showed her contempt for him very openly by banging the door shut as soon as he had stepped outside. He went slowly into the hall, hoping to meet his mistress there, for he longed to show her the lovely eggs. That moment the younger maid came running into the hall and collided with him. "Can't you make room, you vagabond?" she cried sharply.

Jörli was entering the mill just as Long Kaspar stepped outside.

"Go and show master that only one of us knows anything about the work! Yes, only the tramp and vagabond!" he said mockingly, shoving the boy aside.

Kaspar had said these words in a low voice

because the miller was inside. Just the same the insult seared poor Jörli's soul. He ran to the duck-pond, which was at the furthest corner of the yard. Here he sat down on a stone beside the pond and began to weep. He had often been tempted to tell his mistress about all the insults he had to bear, because she would surely have protected him. But that would have made them all still more hostile, and he could not have borne that. Till now he had hoped that if he said nothing and remained friendly, they would eventually get kinder too. Instead of that they only grew more scornful and contemptuous, and he knew the reason of this. They had a family and a home and knew where they belonged, while he. . . . Here Jörli was overcome with grief and had to wipe away his tears. Even his chickens over there had a home where they belonged and one could not call them vagabonds. No, he was the only homeless tramp here. At that moment Jörli thought of his grandfather, whom he had quite forgotten while things were going well. But now in his mind he saw the old man vividly before him and felt as if he could actually talk

to him. "Oh, poor grandfather, you don't know where to go to, either," Jörli sobbed, as he suddenly remembered that his grandfather would soon be obliged to leave the little house in the mountains just as he had done, because he was too old to work. What was the old man to do then? "Oh, grandfather, I'll come and help you," cried Jörli the next moment. He jumped up and bounded towards the house.

"Where is mistress?" he asked the elder maid, who was just coming out.

"Is there a fire somewhere, or what is the hurry?" she dryly remarked before going further.

Jörli ran inside and found the miller's wife sitting comfortably in the sunny room. She was slicing beautiful red apples for a pie and her gray cat purred so cosily at her feet that it seemed as if there were nothing else in the world but sunny rooms and pleasant homes. Jörli gazed at the cat as if he meant to say, "You are lucky to be at home here in this splendid room."

"Well, Jorli, what good news do you bring me? Come, take this apple," said the woman,

handing him the best apple she could find. Jörli politely thanked her but did not attempt to eat it.

“I must go back to grandfather at once. I had better go right now, and if I run hard I might get to him to-day.”

Jörli had never before shown such agitation and haste. The woman laid aside her knife and looked at him.

“What is the matter with you, Jörli? Did anything happen?” she asked. “Have you had some news from your grandfather?”

“No, but he’ll soon have to leave the house, I know, and perhaps he has left already. Oh, he probably doesn’t know where to go. I must go and help him,” answered Jörli, in great distress of mind.

“I am glad you want to do something for your grandfather, Jörli, but that isn’t the way to do it,” said the miller’s wife firmly. “Just stay where you are and I’ll make inquiries regarding your grandfather. We can send him money from time to time and a little later you can go to see him. You have hardly been here

six weeks, and it isn't good to change your work so soon."

Jörli got still more anxious and frightened. "Oh, but I must go, I just have to," he wailed. "Perhaps grandfather is already on the road and everybody is sending him away. He can't work any more and people might call him vagabond and tramp. And he can't help it."

Tears ran ever more plentifully down Jörli's cheeks, completely choking his voice. The woman had never seen the boy so upset. He trembled violently, as if the strain of waiting was too terrible to be borne, and yet he had to obey her. She felt great pity for him.

"Jörli, I'll do everything I can so you can leave to-morrow morning," she said kindly; "but it cannot be to-day, for I must first talk with your master. You can't just run away, he wouldn't like it. You know that. But I promise to take your part and see to it so you can go soon. Dry your tears now, for you shall bring your grandfather a nice sum of money, which will enable him to find a lodging. Then you can come back to us. We won't forget your grandfather, Jörli, for he took good

care of you, and we are grateful he did so." Here Jörli silently left the room.

When the wife was alone with her husband that evening, she told him of Jörli's resolution. The miller at once cried out, "What, does he begin already? Didn't I tell you at once? He is too much like one other I knew who had sharper eyes than I myself, and he seems to be just as restless. No, no, it is out of the question. He must stay here. What? You wish to help him? Just the same, nothing you can say will change my decision. He must stay here. Send the old man some money, for I know he is only too glad the boy is here and able to earn some money. We must send him plenty."

But the miller's wife was obliged to speak against the wishes of her own heart. She remembered Jörli's looks of supplication, and she felt his dreadful agitation. She must help the boy. She showed the miller that he wasn't their own boy and they had no right to keep him when he wished to see his grandfather. Jörli had just been overcome by homesickness and she was sure he would return. Also the

grandfather would send him back. It was wrong to keep him; they must let him go. She talked a long time and got warmer and warmer the more she thought of Jörli's utter confidence in her promise. The miller blew thicker and thicker clouds of smoke from his pipe. After being silent a long while, he said at last as he arose, "Let him go then, if you wish it, but I know he won't come back."

With this prediction the miller left the room. These last words woke a sad memory in the woman's heart. Once before her husband had said the same words, and they had come true. Laying her head on her arm, she wept in bitter sorrow.

CHAPTER VI

JÖRLI TRAVELS TWICE

No ONE who saw the miller's wife busying herself vigorously the next morning would have taken her for the woman who had cried so bitterly the night before. She first packed Jörli's clothes in his knapsack and then added two large ham sandwiches and six hard-boiled eggs, for the little wanderer would frequently get hungry on the long journey ahead of him.

"May God protect you, Jörli! Come back to us soon," she said now, holding out her hand. "Tell your grandfather that you will regularly earn the same sum of money for him that the master has given you just now. Then he'll let you come back, for he can't help being pleased."

Though he had already said good-bye once, Jörli was still holding his mistress's hand. "I want to thank you many hundred times for being so good," he began, but it was clear that something was still troubling him. "What is it. Jörli, do you still want something? Tell me, child," asked the miller's wife kindly.

“May I have my mandolin back?” the boy asked shyly.

“Oh, I quite forgot about it,” said the woman. “But why can’t we keep it in the cupboard till you come back?”

Jörli pulled back his hand and got ready to go, but big tears stood in his eyes.

“No, no, if you love it so much you must take it along,” said the mistress, quickly opening the cupboard. “And when you come back again, Jörli, leave it behind with your grandfather. Your master doesn’t care to see it here.”

She had meanwhile fetched down the old instrument and unrolled the ribbon in order to hang it round the boy.

“Gracious heavens! that’s his mandolin,” shrieked the woman so piercingly that Jörli stared at her in fright. “Yes, here is his name, and I was watching him while he scratched it in. Where did you get this mandolin, Jörli?”

“I don’t know,” replied the boy, still more frightened. “I got it from grandfather and my father had it, too.”

“Where did your father live, Jörli? Was

he on the mountain with your grandfather? You don't seem to know anything, child. Just the same your grandfather must know something."

Jörli tried to tell her all he knew, but it had been a long while since his grandfather had spoken of his father. He had never seen his mistress so violently agitated, and he felt scared. Before he had the chance to say anything she had rushed outside. Jörli took up his mandolin now, wondering deeply what name the mistress had discovered that he had never read himself. Yes, here was a name scratched into the corner. The letters were so tiny that Jörli found them hard to decipher. When he at last succeeded, he read, "Melchior Stauffer, Stauffer-Mill, Thun Lake." Had the mandolin belonged to the miller himself? That certainly was his master's name, for Jörli had seen it in black letters on all the flour-sacks. Perhaps the miller couldn't bear to look at the instrument because it had once been stolen from him. The master might even take it away from him and never give it back, thought Jörli. He listened anxiously for his

master's step and trembled at what might happen.

Twice the miller's wife had been obliged to have her husband summoned from the mill, for she did not wish to speak to him before the workmen. When he came out at last, his wife exclaimed at once, "I must have a horse and carriage, Stauffer. I must leave at once, for I have just found the first trace we have had of him for fourteen years. His name is scratched into Jörli's mandolin and there can't be any mistake, for I watched him doing it. The old man must know where Jörli got the instrument, and I have decided to go to him now. Yes, I mean to-day. Perhaps I can find him yet."

The miller shook his head. "It won't do any good," he said dispassionately, but when he turned his back, the woman clutched his sleeve. "Listen Stauffer," she said, "if you won't let me drive, I mean to walk all the way. Nobody can keep me from going to the old man."

The excited woman had spoken so decidedly that the miller saw no way out. Shrugging his

shoulders with pity, he called over to the stable, "Hitch up the brown horse!" In the shortest time the woman was ready, and fetching out Jörli, who had anxiously waited all the time, she bade him climb into the carriage. Then she sat down beside him and they set out, Jörli not knowing what it meant and where they were going. His mistress was so lost in her own thoughts that she didn't speak a word. She had at once taken the mandolin from Jörli. "You might knock it against something," she had said, laying the instrument on her lap. Here she held it very carefully, glancing from time to time at the little name in the corner. When Jörli saw her quickly wiping away a tear, he got dreadfully worried, for he had never seen her do that before. After quite a long time the miller's wife at last turned to the boy and said in her usual friendly manner, "Oh Jörli, I quite forgot that you don't even know where we are going. I am going with you to the grandfather. You must be hungry."

With that she fetched out the sandwiches and eggs and other things which she had hurriedly put into the basket at her feet. "Take all

you want, Jörli, and enjoy it," she urged him.

Jörli began to feel a little more at ease now, for sitting in a carriage and being driven across country by the lively brown horse was a new experience for him. Though his mistress was silent most of the time, every word she addressed to him was as affectionate as ever, and he had given up worrying about her sudden action. Here and there he recognized the places where he had sat down hungry on his journey hither. Here they had sent him away, and there he had wandered along unhappily, tired and losing courage every minute. If only his grandfather wasn't already wandering about alone and forsaken! This thought worried Jörli a good deal and he was glad they were making such rapid progress.

When they reached the inn at Gesteig, the miller's wife got out. "Unharness him and wait here," she ordered the driver. "We'll be back toward evening." Then she set out toward the mountain. "Is it far?" she asked Jörli, who followed.

"About an hour or so, perhaps a little more," said Jörli, not quite sure himself. The

woman eagerly climbed the path, not speaking a word all the way. When they had walked longer than Jörli had expected, the boy suddenly cried, "Oh, there, look!" A clear stream was foaming down the incline and he was sure that it was his stream. Also the little cottage above was his old home. Jörli began to run. The grandfather, who must have spied the boy, now came out of the hut.

"Oh Jörli, Jörli, are you really coming? This is like a miracle," cried the old man, pressing the boy's hand. "It is true I always thought I should still see you. Just think! I have to leave to-morrow, and I haven't any idea where to go. I had to sing pretty bravely to-day, I can tell you, in order to keep my faith in God. And now you come to me yourself, like the embodiment of the song of comfort I was singing. Who is the woman, child?" he asked, when the miller's wife also arrived on top.

"You must be Jörli's grandfather," she said, eagerly stretching out her hand. "I am so glad to see you. Your boy has been with us all this time, and we've grown very fond of

him. As he wanted to come to see you, I came along too, for I have something important to ask you."

The old man was going to lead the visitor to the cottage where Lene was, but the woman sat down on the bench outside the house, declaring her wish to stay outside. She had to speak to him alone. She had again taken the mandolin from Jörli and put it on her lap, for the boy had carried it up the mountain.

"Please tell me how you, or I should say Jörli's father, got this mandolin?"

After looking at it thoughtfully the old man answered, "I can't tell you a single thing about it."

"Then I'll have to search somewhere else," said the woman determinedly. "Where did your son die? Where did he live?"

"Well, things are a little different from what you think probably. You see I had no son at all," replied the grandfather slowly.

"Then did Jörli's mandolin belong to your son-in-law? Jörli told me it belonged to his father. Please tell me where he lived? Where can I find him?"

“No, I never had a son-in-law, either,” said the old man deliberately.

The visitor looked expectantly at the old man, but he said nothing further.

“I wouldn’t pry into your affairs,” said the woman with some show of impatience, “but this name here on the mandolin happens to concern me very closely, and I am not going to rest till I know how the instrument has come into your hands. I’ll just have to go and inquire further.”

“Please tell her everything you know, grandfather, for you have no idea how good and kind she has always been to me,” Jörli whispered to the old man. The latter acted very strangely, however. He seemed to hear nothing and he stared at the mandolin as if it were the greatest wonder of the world. One could see that his thoughts returned from years long past when he said at last:

“Is his name really scratched into the instrument? Oh dear, who could have thought of that? And to think how hard we looked through all his pockets and searched through all his clothes, hoping to find some scrap of

paper or some mark. Yes, those monks certainly did try hard. Can it be true you know the name?"

The woman nodded. "Please go on. What more do you know?" she questioned breathlessly.

"Well, lady, if that is so, I'll have to tell you everything, I am sure," said the old man. "And Jörli must hear it too, for he knows nothing either. It happened about eight years ago, quite early in the year when the high mountain passes were entirely snowed in. I had taken two gentlemen over the great Bernard Pass to Orosta and was just starting home across the mountain. The weather was raw and the sky a dark gray, and I said to myself, 'Soon a storm will come; you had better run and get to the top before it begins.' I hurried all I could and after about an hour's climb, just before reaching the summit, I overtook a man who was carrying a small boy on his back. I noticed how hard the stranger was panting. 'Good friend,' I said to him, 'I can see you are having a hard time. Give me the boy for a little while. A bad storm is coming

and we had better hurry.' The stranger had seen it too, and he seemed very grateful when I took the little boy. The sky then grew blacker and blacker. Soon thick flakes began to fall and I had to talk to the young man, for he was near giving up. He seemed quite unable to keep up with me. Though he was still quite young, I noticed that he was ill. Finally I had to pull him along with all my strength, for the storm grew very bad. We got to the top though, and the good monks in the hospice took us in and tried to make us comfortable in front of a roaring fire. But the clothes of the little boy were frozen stiff, and the father was so exhausted that the monks put both in a warm bed. They did everything in their power for them. One of the monks stayed up all night and gave the sick man a strengthening draught from time to time. He had not said a word up till now, but in the night he suddenly showed a desire to talk. The monk could not understand anything, except that the traveller was returning to his parents. He wanted to bring home his little boy and he begged to have his people notified. But just as he was trying to say his

name, his strength gave out and he couldn't do it. After pointing to his things, he fell back and died. The monks said that he had had a stroke. In the morning the little boy lay well and rosy beside his dead father. We searched through all his belongings but couldn't find a name. Oh yes, there were two initials on some of his clothes. The monks were sure some scrap of paper or a wallet would reveal the man's identity, but they looked in vain. The good old prior himself came out to me and said that I must take the little one to the valley, as it was impossible for a child to live up there. Some kind-hearted family would be sure to take the lad. Then he gave me some money for the little one's keep. They decided to exhibit the dead man's body in the hospice and give out a general notice of his death. This would be sure to bring the family. They would come and tell me as soon as this had been accomplished, and I could tell them where the small boy was placed. I took the little one once more on my back and wandered down to the valley with him. He prattled very pleasantly and told me his name

was Jörli. But he didn't know anything more. From time to time he asked longingly for his father, and I had to console him by saying that his father was soon coming. At those times I couldn't keep back the tears, from pity for the little orphan. Soon I grew so fond of him that I decided to keep the boy till his relatives would fetch him, but no news ever came from the hospice, and when I went back there two years later I heard that no one had ever inquired after the dead stranger. Also the prior was satisfied that I had kept the boy myself. The stranger had carried this mandolin and a knapsack, which I took along, for it belonged to the boy. But who could have thought that the name was written on the instrument?"

Hot tears had been pouring down the woman's cheeks. "Jörli, Jörli, come to me," she cried, deeply moved. "Come to me, for I am your grandmother. Yes, you belong to us, and I know now why my heart was always so stirred when you looked at me. Yes, Jörli, you look at me just the way Melchior used to do. You see, Jörli, your father was our son. Yes, he was our Melchior, my beloved son."

The woman was so stirred that the old man also was obliged to wipe his eyes. Jörli, a moment later, clung in mute astonishment to his affectionate grandmother. He looked happier every moment. When the miller's wife had regained control of her emotions, she turned to the guide.

"We owe you a tremendous debt, my friend," she said, offering him her hand, "and I hope God will help us to repay you. But please tell me if you happen to remember anything more about my son. I should treasure even a single word."

The old man tried to think very hard, but upon recalling the scene he knew they had been silent all the way. The storm had been terrific and his companion was too weary to talk. But upon taking the boy on his back he remembered asking the father about the child's mother. His companion had pointed in the direction of Italy and had answered, "Dead and buried in her home." "Oh, now I remember something else," added the old man. "I have a shawl upstairs which Jörli wouldn't take along because he always found it too

warm to wear. But as it is still beautiful, I decided to keep it carefully for him."

The old man went inside and brought out a gray scarf with bright red stripes. The woman knew it at once, for she had knitted it for her son as a gift for the last Christmas he had spent at home. She saw him vividly before her, laughingly putting on the shawl. Her tears fell upon it and she could not speak.

"One who set such store by his mother's gift never did forget her," said the old man comfortingly.

"Now, you must hear something about Jörli's father," the miller's wife said after a considerable pause, "for you can't help wondering how it all happened, and you certainly deserve to be told. Our Melchior was a very clever lad and unusually able in every way. My husband was extremely proud of him, and it was his ambition to have Melchior the most respected miller in the whole countryside. Once we happened to be building an addition to the mill and among the masons was an Italian who could sing like a bird and who also had this mandolin. Our son was about seven-

teen then. He was very much taken with the Italian, whose name was Marlo, and the two were always together and sang and played so delightfully that it was a joy to hear them. Marlo was a very pleasant, decent fellow, and there was no reason why the two should not be friends. As a matter of fact, they spent all their free time at music. In the shortest time our Melchior had learned to play too; yes, and he soon played much better than his teacher. This is true, because Marlo said so himself. But this made him too fond of music, which began to mean more to him than anything else. Marlo went away after a while, but the mandolin remained, for Melchior had bought it from him. My husband didn't quite approve of music during the day, for Melchior had often to be fetched to the mill from his music. At that time he showed a desire to travel, and we thought travelling and new knowledge in his trade would help him. It was then he left us. He wrote faithfully about the places he visited but nothing about his occupation. After two years my husband wrote to him to come home, and Melchior answered that he couldn't come. He told us the truth for the first time,

namely, that he had been only studying music all these years. As he was anxious to use his knowledge now, he only gave a vague promise to come home some time or other. I remember my husband saying right away that he would never come back. Yes, my husband was so deeply affected by Melchior's letter that the sorrow and anger he felt made him very ill. But I kept up my hope that our son would return and this kept me alive. Melchior still wrote to us from time to time till about fourteen years ago, when he told us that he had settled in Italy. That was his last letter. He must have married there. But I wasn't absolutely wrong when I thought he would return. After all, he meant to come home and bring us his little boy. But we must go now and take Jörli to his grandfather. Oh, I cannot remain here any longer, and you must come with us. You shall be Jörli's second grandfather, and you shall live in the mill with the boy and us."

When Jörli heard this he cried exultantly, "Oh, grandfather, now you know where to go and you won't have to trudge along the road alone. Oh, thank you a thousand times," he exclaimed, embracing his grandmother. In his

joy he could find no other words than, "Oh, I am so glad for grandfather, oh, I am so glad." This he repeated over and over again.

The grandfather had been so overcome by the woman's words that he hardly dared to believe them. Was he really to have a permanent home and suddenly be free of cares? The best of it all was, though, that he was able to remain with his darling Jörli, who belonged to a respected family. All this seemed more than he had ever dared to pray for. The old man stood there, still irresolute. He could not have heard correctly. Just the same, Jörli had understood the situation and flew upstairs to the grandfather's well-known chamber. He took the few clothes he found there and rolled them up into a bundle, one over the other. Then he finally fastened a string around it, flung it over his shoulder and ran down again.

"That is right, Jörli," said the grandmother, delighted; "we must go now."

This at last showed the old man that both were in earnest. After running indoors once more to shake Lene's hand he set out with a heart so overflowing that he ran down the

mountain like a youth. The three reached the inn at Gesteig ever so much sooner than they had expected. "Harness him up quickly," said the miller's wife impatiently, and then she let the brown horse trot as she had never done before. "I can't wait till I get home."

Supper was over in the Stauffer mill. The men had left the room, and the miller had settled down to his solitary little table, but feeling very restless, he rose again and began to walk up and down the room. Suddenly he heard the sound of carriage-wheels. "How can that be?" he said to himself, standing still. "It is impossible! She couldn't be back yet, for she won't give up till she has some news. No, not if she has to drive about the countryside for weeks. I know her." Just the same the carriage came nearer and stopped at the door. The miller went outside. "Stauffer," called out his wife at once, "come here and lift the boy out of the carriage. He belongs to us—he is Melchior's son."

The miller approached in silence. He lifted the boy from the carriage and led him up to the carriage light. "Oh, it's you, Jörli, it's you!"

he said, taking the boy's hand and leading him indoors. Here in the bright light he examined the lad with piercing glances and carefully searched every lineament and feature. But he still said nothing. His wife had entered now, and she was followed by Fretz, the old mountain guide.

"You have no cause to doubt it, Stauffer," said the woman as she approached her husband. "I have absolute proofs that he belongs to us just as Melchior belonged to us."

"I don't doubt it for a moment, woman," answered the miller in a voice bright with happiness. "If some one had come and told me that this was Melchior's son, I should have believed him without a single proof. He is like Melchior in everything and he takes hold of things and handles them exactly as Melchior did. This has often frightened me, for it is the sort of thing they tell in stories. So you are my grandson, Jörli," continued the miller, seizing the lad's hand. "And did you come back gladly to your grandfather and the mill?"

"Oh yes, grandfather, I am ever so glad

to come back again," replied Jörli with happy eyes, "and to grandmother, too."

"I am glad to hear it," said the miller, vigorously shaking the boy's hand. "Come here, grandmother! We must all sit down together and have a feast. Tell them to prepare a meal for us, for now we must make merry together. Then we must hear all that has happened, too. We must show Jörli that he has found a home with his grandparents."

The miller's wife was intensely happy, for her husband had not shown such life and spirit for years. But she did not forget her companion, the guide, who up to now had been standing quietly in a corner. "Here is some one else who must rejoice with us," she said, drawing him forward. "This is Jörli's second grandfather. He raised the boy, and we'll never be able to thank him enough."

The miller took the old man's hand and shook it.

The miller's wife now told the whole story, taking care that the guide got his full share of appreciation for all he had done for her son and Jörli.

After the description of the night on the St. Bernard, a deep silence filled the room, for the woman could not speak for a moment. Here the miller went outside. When he returned he silently pressed the guide's hand, then he sat down beside Jörli. After patting the boy's shoulder a few times he said, "Let us be grateful that you came here where you belong, Jörli. Now quickly tell me what you would like to become in the future?"

"A miller, grandfather," was the prompt reply, "and in a beautiful mill like yours, too, grandfather."

The miller laughed so heartily that his joy proved contagious.

"Just look at that youngster! Doesn't he know a good thing when he sees it! I should say he didn't have his eyes for nothing," he cried out, as the deep furrows on his brow completely vanished. "I'll show you how to drive our brown horse to-morrow, Jörli, and later on you can tackle the four white ones. I want to see the young master of the Stauffer mill driving about the countryside with his horses before long. Let's touch glasses, boy!

Long life to the Stauffer mill and its young master!"

The wife gazed at her husband in astonishment. He looked simply transformed and had grown at least twenty years younger since yesterday. Then she looked again at her Jörli and her eyes took on an expression the boy well understood. Every few moments he seized her hand and said joyously, "Oh, grandmother, you don't know how glad I am that this is really my home now."

All this time the old guide's face had been shining like the sun. Folding his hands, he said, "I wish I'd be allowed to sing a song of praise with Jörli. That would just about suit me, for I should like to tell our Lord in Heaven how full my heart is of gratitude and praise, and I can do this best by singing."

Jörli looked up at his grandfather a little frightened, for he knew that the latter could not endure music. But the miller nodded his head happily and said, "Of course you may sing! If my young miller attends well to his tasks in daytime, he can sing as many hymns to his grandmother in the evening as he wants."

The guide at once began a song, in which his voice sounded very powerful in comparison with Jörli's bell-like tones. The grandmother had slipped the mandolin into Jörli's hands, for she loved the soft music of the strings, which woke in her memories of a happy past. The miller also listened pleased. At the last lines of the song—

Let all proclaim Thy tender love,
Both those on earth and those above,
Who in Thy heavens dwell—

the woman went quietly outside and up to the attic, where she leaned out of the open window and saw the moonlight lying bright on the white road. "Now I won't be able any longer to gaze out and see if he is coming home," she said to herself, looking out over the road, which she had searched every evening for her son. "I know now that he won't come again, dear Lord in Heaven, but I won't complain if only he is in Heaven with You." Here she was obliged to wipe the tears from her cheeks, for she wanted to come back to the others with a happy face.

Next morning when the whole household

was gathered for breakfast, the miller said with a loud voice, "I have to say something which concerns you all, so listen, men! This boy here is my grandson and you are to treat him as the son of the house. I have found out that my son died on his journey home years ago and this splendid man here took the unknown little boy home with him. He raised him in such an honest God-fearing fashion that the boy is a credit to any household. You are to honor and respect this man as the lad's second grandfather." "

When the miller lads left the house they hung their heads, for they were sure that the master would send them away as soon as Jörli would tell his grandfather how he had been treated. All expected this to happen at once and, strange to say, Long Kaspar was the most frightened of them all. Jörli, who had been sent to the mill by his grandfather with a message to the lads, went there very timidly. He was afraid that the men would be still more embittered against him now because he was more fortunate than they. But as soon as he entered he found them very considerate and

pleasant. Each wished to do him a special favor, and nothing but friendliness was shown him from all sides in order to conciliate him for their previous roughness. Long Kaspar even showed himself happy when Jörli addressed a few words to him. This change took a great burden from Jörli's heart, for he had been genuinely afraid of the men's possible hostility. In his delight he was as friendly now with them as if he had never had anything to suffer from them. This spirit shown by the young master moved the men so deeply that they actually formed a ring round him and each insisted on shaking hands with Jörli first and genuinely wishing him joy at his return as the young master. When he had left the building, the foreman of the mill said to the others, "We've wronged him and he hasn't shown the slightest resentment. We must do something for him too." He went about deeply meditating all day till he had found the right thing to do. He led all the fellows behind the mill for a rehearsal that evening and a bit later they gathered under the windows of the living-room, where the four members of the family

were sitting together. Then they began to sing lustily:

“All hail to thee, O miller’s son,
In this the Stauffer mill!
Thy work thou dost as few have done;
We all acclaim thy skill,
And raise a loud hurrah for thee;
A worthy master thou shalt be.”

The miller at once opened the window and called them all inside. In his great joy he fetched up something from the cellar, and never since the mill had existed had the workmen had such a treat.

Merriment has once again returned to the Stauffer mill and its inmates; every evening happy songs can be heard floating through the yard, accompanied by the soft tinkle of strings. Not a day passes that the miller does not fetch his wife over to the mill. “Come and see him at work,” he always says to her then, for Jörli is his greatest joy and he loves to watch the lad as he goes skilfully from one task to another, always quick and able at whatever he undertakes. The radiant grandmother, too, never can say enough about her grandson’s

merits. Whenever she passes the white, bursting bags she never neglects to say to the miller, "Don't forget your promise to me, Stauffer. As soon as you can get away for a few days, we must take the trip up to the St. Bernard. We owe the good monks a big debt and we must thank them. Some of these bags must come along, too, besides a few other things."

If the miller happens to be alone with his wife he always says again, "You have no idea how changed everything is in the mill now. Since Jörli has returned, the lads show such a pleasant spirit; they meet me quite differently too. I actually enjoy my life again, and in the evening when I hear you sing I can't imagine anything more delightful than to listen to you."

"Yes, Stauffer, I know," is the woman's retort, "he who has no grudge in his heart looks at his fellow-creatures quite differently, and up to heaven, too. It is sad that our Melchior couldn't come home to us as he wished to, but he sent us a blessing just the same. This gift of his has reconciled us with the sorrow of the past and we are able to be glad again."

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